

US Tank Battles

in France 1944-45

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INTRODUCTION

US armored units took part in all the major campaigns in the battles for France, and were a dominant arm in the conduct of these operations. This book is intended to provide a brief pictorial examination of these clashes. Additional photos will be found in previous books in the Concord series of Armored at War.

US tank operations in France involved two types of formations. The armored divisions were intended primarily for mobile operations, and their principal role was to exploit deep behind enemy lines once a penetration had been won by the infantry. Of the sixteen armored divisions raised in World War II, all but one served in the European Theater of Operations (ETO). The separate tank battalions were formed to provide support to the infantry. In France, most infantry divisions had a tank battalion and a tank destroyer temporarily attached to them for the conduct of specific operations. The equipment of these units was highly standardized, and the nearly all units used the M4 and M4A1 medium tank in their medium tank companies, and the M5A1 light tank in their light tank companies. The newer M4A3 medium tank began arriving in late summer as additional units deployed in France.

The landings on Normandy on D-Day included the use of a separate tank battalion to support each of the assault regiments. So at Omaha beach, two tank battalions were the first units scheduled to land, while at Utah another tank battalion provided fire support to the initial waves of troops. These battalions were deployed with two companies of M4 Duplex Drive amphibious tanks and one company of M4 with deep wading trunks. Due to the rough seas, most of the DD tanks in the 741st Tank Battalion sank. Nevertheless, the tank battalions played a useful role in knocking out German bunkers.

The US Army was unprepared for the battlefield conditions that followed the landings, having underestimated the effects of the dense hedgerows, called *bocage*. The *bocage* formed a natural defensive barrier to a war of maneuver, and US operations were severely inhibited by the terrain. As a result, most of the fighting in the first month of the

Normandy campaign was dominated by close range infantry fighting. These problems were not restricted to the US Army. When the Wehrmacht attempted to launch panzer counter-attacks against the American beach-head, such as the attack by Panzer Lehr Division on 11 July, these too proved to be severely limited by the defensive advantages of the *bocage* and the Panzer Lehr Division took heavy losses. At a considerable cost in men and material, the US Army gradually began to adapt to the new terrain, capturing the port of Cherbourg by the end of June, and the vital road junction of St. Lo by mid-July. The Wehrmacht concentrated most of its panzer divisions further east in the better tank country around Caen, fearing the threat of a British armored break-out. By mid-July, the American sector was defended by one full strength panzer division, the 2.SS-Panzer Division Das Reich, and two other divisions that had become badly beat up in the *bocage* fighting, the Panzer Lehr Division and the 17.SS-Pz.Grenadier Division. By this stage, the US Army had two armored divisions in Normandy with Bradley's First Army, the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions, and two more were added when Patton's Third Army was secretly transferred from the UK, the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions. These provided the vital mass of maneuver needed for a new operation, codenamed "Cobra", which was intended to rip open the thinly defended German lines and secure a break-out from Normandy.

In anticipation of the break-out operation, the US Army deployed one of its secret weapons. US units had been experimenting with various types of devices to permit a tank to crash through the dense hedgerows. Called "rhinos", these came in a broader range of shapes and types than is generally realized. More than six hundred of these were locally manufactured in mid-July and fastened to the front of many tanks. In reality, they did not prove as useful as expected, but this was in part due to the rapidity of the US Army advance. Operation Cobra began with a carpet bombing attack against the thinly stretched Panzer Lehr Division which obliterated its forward defenses. Within days, the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions were racing deep behind the

German lines. In hopes of preparing his remaining panzers for a counter-attack, the German Seventh Army commander directed their withdrawal towards the road junction at Percy, unwittingly positioning them to be surrounded and cut-off. During the last week of July, the 2.SS-Panzer Division and the remnants of the 17.SS-Pz.Grenadier Division were cut off and most of their armored equipment lost in the encirclement battle with the 2nd Armored Division around Roncey.

While the First Army was dealing with the remnants of the German Seventh Army, Patton's new Third Army was injected into the crumbling defenses near the coast, racing for Avranches, the gateway into Brittany. Allied planning had placed the capture of the Breton ports as one of its key summer objectives. The 4th Armored Division raced across the base of the peninsula, cutting it off from further reinforcement, while the 6th Armored Division made one of the fastest and deepest advances in US Army history, isolating the key port at Brest. In the end, the Brittany mission proved to be a sideshow as more alluring targets beckoned.

The German response to the American breakout during Operation Cobra was a panzer counter-offensive of their own, dubbed Operation Lutlich. The aim of this operation was to split US and British forces by a panzer drive to the sea. In reality, German panzer units no longer had the offensive power to conduct operations of this magnitude, and Operation Lutlich was stopped cold at Mortain by the 30th Infantry Division. It exhausted German panzer reserves in France, and gravely weakened the forces attempting to hold back the British around Caen. With the panzer forces depleted, British forces stormed out of the Caen area, and a gigantic pincer began to form around the German army in Normandy near Falaise.

The opportunity for a grand envelopment attracted Patton's attention, and he convinced Bradley to allow him to shift resources from the missions in Brittany against the more alluring objective of the Seine river. The British pincer aimed at Falaise was slower than anticipated due to determined German

resistance, but the US Army was able to race across France further to the south, reaching the Seine river by the third week of August. The Falaise pocket trapped most of the German forces in France, and even those that escaped had to run the gauntlet a second time to escape across the Seine.

To further complicate German defenses, on 15 August, the US Seventh Army landed in southern France as part of Operation Dragoon. The southern France landings were intended to wrest control of southern and central France from the Wehrmacht. With the near collapse of the main Wehrmacht forces in northern France near Falaise, and the prospect increasing that the remaining forces would soon be trapped by the US Seventh Army, in mid-August, the German army ordered the withdrawal of the garrisons in central and southern France. The 11. Panzer Division fought a series of delaying actions as the US Seventh Army advanced northward towards the Swiss frontier and into Lorraine.

By the end of August 1944, the Allies had liberated Paris and were on the doorstep of Belgium. The US First Army entered Belgium in early September and conducted a third envelopment in the Mons pocket, further trapping the remnants of the Wehrmacht in the west. By mid-September, the US First Army had crossed the Siegfried line into Germany near Aachen, starting the campaign in Germany. Eisenhower approved Montgomery's bold plan to leap-frog on to the Rhine plains in northern Germany by seizing a series of key bridges through the Netherlands by means of airborne attacks, code-named Market-Garden. The plan proved to be too ambitious, and after its failure the Allied momentum soon slowed due to lack of supplies. Until a major port like Antwerp could be opened, the Allies had to limit their offensive operations. The Wehrmacht, in spite of the staggering defeats in the summer battles, continued its stubborn defense.

By the autumn of 1944, the US Army had four armies in the ETO. Bradley's 12th Army Group had three of these: the First and Ninth Armies fighting along the German border, and Patton's Third Army fighting in Lorraine. Dever's 6th Army Group had two more armies, the US Seventh Army and the French First Army,

fighting to the south in Alsace. As a result, US fighting in France in the autumn of 1944 was concentrated in eastern France in the contested region of Alsace-Lorraine. German defense of these regions was more intense than in other areas, as these two provinces had been incorporated back into the Reich after the defeat of France in 1940. In mid-September, Hitler ordered yet another panzer counter-attack against the US Army, this time aimed at cutting off the spearhead of Patton's Third Army which appeared to be on the verge of breaking out of France into the Saar industrial region. With the panzer divisions in the west decimated by the summer fighting, the Wehrmacht was forced to rely on four new panzer brigades originally formed to plug gaps in the Eastern Front. Although well equipped, these new formations were not well trained, and all four were decimated in the fighting in Lorraine, the last two during a rolling tank battle around the town of Arracourt with the 4th Armored Division. This was one of the largest tank battles fought by the US Army in World War II, and both German panzer brigades were destroyed.

Patton's drive into the Saar was brought to a halt in late September by the lack of fuel, and the frontlines in Lorraine began to bog down in the muddy, wet autumn weather. Patton's Third Army became preoccupied with overcoming the fortifications around the medieval city of Metz, a traditional barrier between Germany and France. The front in Alsace remained much more contentious, with the US Seventh Army and the French First Army fighting a series of difficult battles. By mid-October, the 6th Army Group confronted the high Vosges mountains, leading to the Rhine. The fighting in the Vosges continued through November, with the US Army finally breaking through the Saverne gap in mid-November. This campaign was primarily an infantry action with tank support, although there were occasional flare-ups of tank action such as in late November with a number of local German panzer counter-attacks along the Saare river. By the end of November, the US Seventh Army had fought its way out of the Vosges mountains and on to the plains of Alsace, while the First French Army made its way through the Belfort gap. This led to a series of battles for key Alsatian towns and cities including Strasbourg.

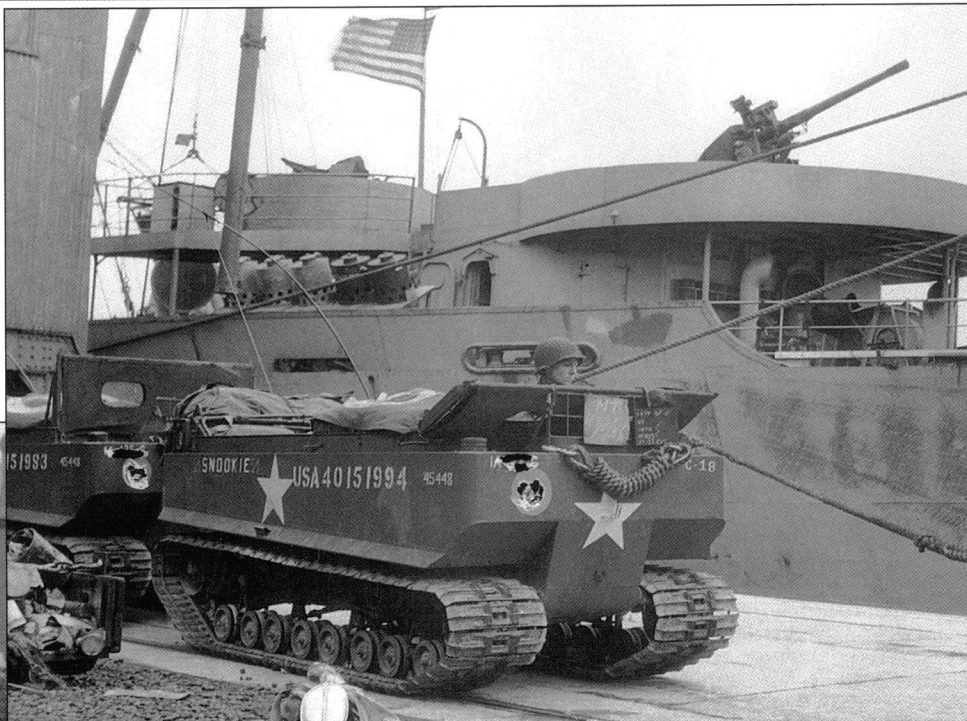
By early December, Dever's 6th Army Group was on the verge of sending forces across the Rhine. However, Eisenhower decided to favor Patton's planned offensive into the Saar, scheduled for mid-December. As a result, the 6th Army Group concentrated on cleaning up German defense in Alsace, such as the Colmar pocket. The US Seventh Army pushed northward towards the Saar in anticipation of supporting Patton's December offensive. The German offensive in the Ardennes in mid-December upset these plans. Patton was forced to divert one of his corps to help relieve Bastogne, and as a result, his planned December offensive into the Saar was put on hold.

By late December, it had become clear even to Hitler that the Ardennes offensive had failed. He planned yet another risky gamble, deciding to throw away what remained of German western reserves against Allied forces in Alsace. Although overshadowed by the continuing battles in the Ardennes, Operation Nordwind was one of the most bitter battles of the winter of 1944-45. The initial German attacks on New Year's Eve threw the US and French forces back through the Hagenau forest. It was followed by a succession of smaller attacks including Operation Sonnenwende (Winter Solstice) on 7 January in the area of the Colmar pocket. These battles, fought in and around the towns of the Alsatian plains, involved significant tank forces on both sides, including two US and three French armored divisions. But it was a campaign decided by brutal infantry combat. The German offensive in Alsace was quickly worn down, and the US and French forces resumed the task of reducing German defenses in the Colmar pocket in late January. By March, Alsace was firmly in Allied hands, and the 6th Army Group began its assaults against the Westwall and into southern Germany. This campaign is depicted in the accompanying book in this series on US tank battles in Germany (Concord #7046).

The photographs here unless otherwise noted are all official US Army Signal Corps photos from the collections of the US National Archives, the Patton Museum at Ft. Knox, the Military History Institute at the US Army War College, and the special collections at the US Military Academy, West Point.

D-Day

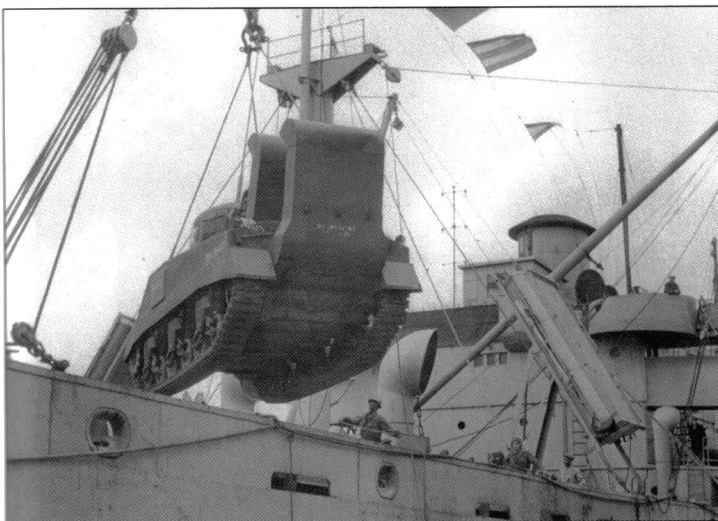
A M29 tracked utility vehicle named "Snookie" is prepared for loading at a British port prior to the D-Day landings in Normandy. These small tracked vehicle were widely used in engineer units in the Normandy campaign. The unit identification code has been obscured by the censor.



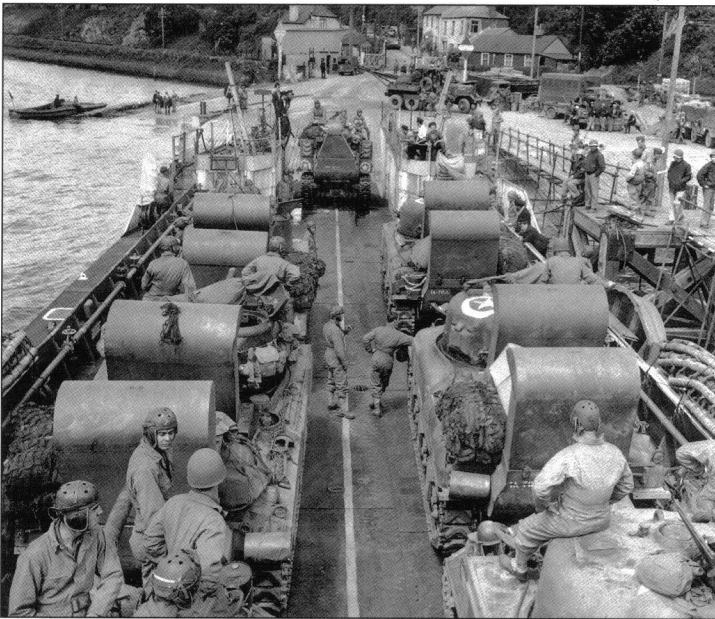
A battery of 155mm howitzers towed by M5 high speed tractors of field artillery battalion prepare to load aboard landing ships at a port in southern England prior to the D-Day landings.



The crew of an M4 prepare to load their tank at a port in southern England prior to the D-Day landings.



An M4 fitted with deep wading trunks is loaded aboard a transport ship in Britain in June 1944. The wading trunks were part of a more extensive effort to make the tanks water-tight so that they could be landed in water as deep as the turret roof, and the tank could then drive to shore.



A LCT loads at a port in Devonshire on the southern English coast on 4 June 1944 prior to the Normandy landings. This LCT is carrying M4 tanks of the 70th Tank Battalion, and one of the unit's T2 tank recovery vehicles is backing up the access ramp at the front. These vehicles are fitted with deep wading trunks, and they were landed on D-Day at Utah Beach.



This is a M4A1 of Co. A, 741st Tank Battalion damaged on Omaha Beach on D-Day after its rear bogie assembly was hit by a 50mm anti-tank gun during a duel with a German bunker in the E-1 St. Laurent draw.



The Dog White section of Omaha Beach is littered with shattered vehicles and craft at low tide on the evening of D-Day, 6 June 1944. The M4 tank, C-13 "Ceaseless" is from Co. C., 743rd Tank Battalion and was disabled on the beach after losing a track. The other two companies of tanks from this battalion were M4A1 Duplex Drive amphibious tanks.

This is another view of tank A-13 "Adeline II", damaged on Omaha beach on D-Day. The tank could still move in spite of the damage, but it could not surmount the sea wall to exit the beach. It was later recovered by the battalion's T2 tank recovery vehicle and is seen being towed through Colleville after D-Day for repair.





A M3A1 half-track of a towed tank destroyer battalion brings ashore its 3-inch anti-tank gun at Utah beach a few days after D-Day. The tank destroyer battalions in Normandy were a mixture of self-propelled battalions with M10 or M18 GMC and the towed battalions with the 3-inch anti-tank gun.



A M4 medium tank of the 2nd Armored Division comes ashore from an LST at Utah Beach on 8 January 1944. Although the censor has obliterated the unit code on the transmission cover, the Quartermaster shipping code (4453Q) is visible on the lower edge of the cover.



Another M4 medium tank from 2nd Armored Division comes ashore from an LST on Utah beach on 9 June 1944. The tanks were prepared for deep wading with wading trunks fitted to the engine air access points, and the rest of the tank sealed with canvas and sealant. The markings identify it as a tank of company H of one of the division's two armored regiments. Of the tank units in the ETO, only the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions retained the old 1942 regimental structure, so they were the only US units to have tank companies with high letter identifications like H and I.



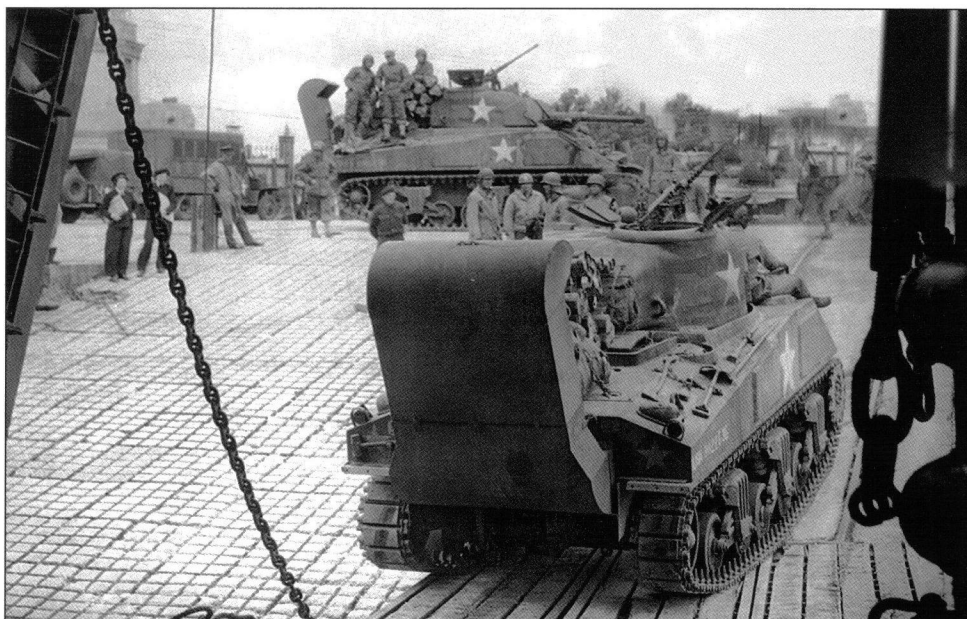
Tanks of Co. I, 67th Armored Regiment, 2nd Armored Division move to the docks in Weymouth, England prior to transit to Normandy on 10 June 1944. They are already fitted with deep wading trunks. There is a column of German POWs in the lower right corner, captured in Normandy in the previous three days fighting. Since the beach-head was not very large, German prisoners for the first few days of the fighting were sent back to England on landing craft returning to pick up other units.



A M3A1 half-track of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, 2nd Armored Division comes ashore at Utah Beach on 9 June 1944.



A group of M4 tanks of the 3rd Armored Division prepare to load aboard LSTs for transport to Normandy in June 1944 in the UK. Most tanks delivered to France in June 1944 were fitted with deep wading trunks to permit the LSTs to land them from a short distance off-shore. After D-Day, most were landed directly on shore, and the 3rd Armored Division arrived on 23 June 1944.



M4 tanks of the 3rd Armored Division load aboard landing craft in a British harbor on their way to Normandy.

The Normandy Campaign, June 1944

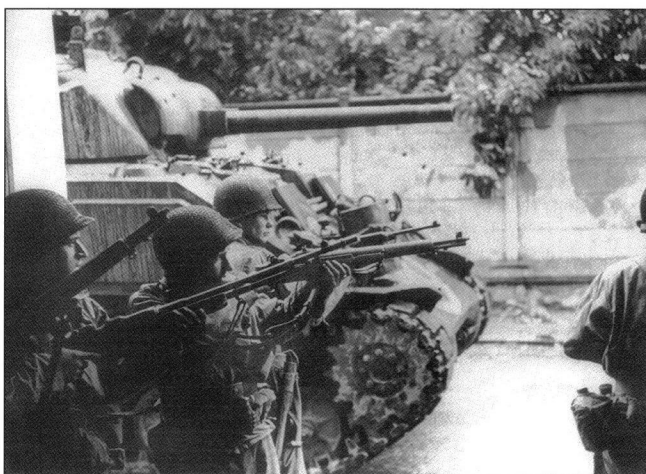


GIs of the 4th Infantry Division escort a group of German prisoners as a M4 medium tank of the 70th Tank Battalion passes by during the fighting west of St. Mere Eglise on 10 June 1944 as part of the VII Corps effort to expand the Utah beachhead towards Cherbourg.

A M7 105mm HMC moves to the front in Normandy on 13 June 1944 as part of the efforts to expand the beach-head. The circled star insignia on the bow is not common, but was seen in some units which painted the area around the star with the gray-green gas detection paint.



A M32B1 tank recovery vehicle named "Step N' Fetchit" after the popular radio character passes through the town of St. Mere Eglise on 21 June 1944 during the fighting for St. Lo. It is towing a M4 medium tank. There were five T2 or M32 tank recovery vehicles in each tank battalion, one in each of the three medium tank companies, and two with the battalion's service company.



A M4 tank from the 740th Tank Battalion supports a group of GIs during the street fighting in Cherbourg which began in earnest on 21 June with an assault by the 4th and 79th Divisions.



A pair of M4 tanks of the 740th Tank Battalion move through Cherbourg on 27 June 1944. This was the first Normandy port to fall into Allied hands, but the Germans had so thoroughly demolished the port facilities, that it was of little benefit to the Allies for months.



GIs inspect a 4.7cm PaK (t) auf Pz.Kpfw. 35R (f), a tank destroyer consisting of a Czechoslovak 47mm gun mounted on a French Renault R-35 chassis. There were 110 of these in service in France in 1944, and encountered mainly in Normandy. This one was abandoned in Littry and was photographed on 20 June 1944.

A M4 medium tank of Co. B, 740th Tank Battalion named "Big-Bad-Momma" is serviced by its crew in Cherbourg after the port city fell earlier in the month. For the first three months of the French campaign, the M4 and M4A1 medium tanks were the predominant types in US Army service. The newer, and preferred, M4A3 did not begin to appear in large numbers until the late summer.



A US Army Military Police patrol use a captured Kettenkrad tracked motorcycle while on duty in the seaport of Cherbourg after its capture in late June 1944.



A M4 composite hull medium tank extracts itself from a muddy irrigation ditch alongside a hedgerow in Normandy in late June 1944. The *bocage* so characteristic of this section of Normandy made tank operations especially difficult in the first month of fighting.

During the fighting near the Ariel bridge on the Pont Hebert highway on 8 July, CCA of the US 3rd Armored Division ran into a small panzer force from Kampfgruppe Heinz of 17.SS-Pz.Gren.Div., knocking out five Pz.Kpfw. IV tanks while losing one M4 medium tank. This is a view as an armored infantry in M3 half-tracks pass by two of the knocked out panzers.





A T2 tank recovery vehicle recovers a M4 knocked out in the fighting in the hedgerow country of Normandy during the July fighting. The large turret tactical numbers are typical of both the 2nd and 3rd Armored Division during Operation Cobra. They were often painted over in late July prior to Cobra when the First Army switched to an olive drab/black camouflage scheme.



A M4 tank moves through the contested town of Periers in mid-July with a M10 3-in. GMC tank destroyer behind it.



A very clear example of why a Sherman was not a good match for a Panther. This particular M4A1 engaged in an unequal duel with a Panther from the Panzer Lehr Division, and is seen here on 20 July after the German panzer offensive had been beaten back. Besides the six hits from the Panther's 75mm gun there are two smaller holes on the M4A1 from *panzerfaust* or *panzerschreck* rocket launchers.



A M10 3-in GMC, from the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, supporting the 3rd Armored Division near St. Jean de Daye on 11 July 1944. That day, the Panzer Lehr Division launched a counter-attack in this sector, and the tank destroyers were credited with knocking out ten Panthers and a Pz.Kpfw. IV. This vehicle has the tactical number A21 painted on the side along with the vehicle name "Accident", identifying it as a tank destroyer of Co. A.



Panzer Lehr Division staged a number of attacks in the difficult bocage country through July, losing large numbers of tanks. From a starting strength of 99 Pz.Kpfw. IV and 89 Panthers, it had been reduced to only 15 operational Pz.Kpfw. IV and 16 Panthers at the time of the start of Operation Cobra. This Panther was knocked out by a 57mm anti-tank gun and was photographed near St. Lo on 20 July 1944. No fewer than four penetrations can be seen near the driver's station.



Another view of the Panther Ausf. A of Panzer Lehr Division knocked out by a 57mm anti-tank gun. Although the Panther was invulnerable to the 57mm gun frontally, it was very vulnerable on the side.



A pair of Panthers block a narrow country lane in Le Desert after the failed Panzer Lehr Division counterattack of 11 July 1944.



A wrecker truck is used to remove a 3 inch gun from a M10 3-in. GMC tank destroyer in a repair area in Normandy prior to Operation Cobra. The M4 medium tank in the background is probably from the 2nd Armored Division.



The capture of the key road junction at St. Lo was vital to the American plans for Operation Cobra and it finally fell on 18-19 July, setting the stage for the offensive. In the ruins of the city is a German Sd.Kfz. 231 armored car, a relatively old type of reconnaissance vehicle that had been largely replaced with the more modern Sd.Kfz. 234 series by the time of the Normandy campaign.

This is a StuG IV based on the Pz.Kpfw. IV chassis, which was less common than the StuG III in Normandy. This particular vehicle served with SS-Panzer Abt. 17 of the 17.SS-Pz.Gren. Div. and was knocked out during fighting near Periers shortly before the outbreak of Operation Cobra.



A Sd.Kfz. 222 armored car knocked out by the 1/8th Infantry during the fighting near St. Lo on 15 July 1944. The armor on the rear of the vehicle has been blown off, exposing the engine.

A GI looks over a Pz.Jäger 38 (t) Ausf. M Marder III that was knocked out in the fighting around St. Lo on 18 July 1944. The front appear to have been hit by a major caliber artillery round which has collapsed the front armor.



Operation Cobra, July 1944

The "Salad Fork" developed by the 747th Tank Battalion was one of the first attempts to develop a device to cut through hedges. The two pointed timbers created tunnels in the base of the hedge that could be filled with explosives and a breach created by accompanying engineers. (US Army)



The "Green Dozer" was developed after the Salad Fork to push through hedgerows. It was less successful, but used in small numbers by the 747th Tank Battalion. It is seen here on a M4 of the 747th Tank Battalion. (US Army)

The most widely used of the hedgerow busting devices was developed by Sgt. Curtis Culin. It was first mounted on a M5A1 of the 102nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, and displayed to a number of senior officers on 14 July 1944 as seen here. This demonstration led Gen. Omar Bradley to order the device into large scale production,



The classic Rhinoceros hedgerow devices was the T1, developed by Sgt. Curtis Culin. There were several variations of the T1 Rhinoceros such as this T1E1 Rhinoceros on a M10 3-inch GMC. This had an additional prong in the center. (MHI)



Another variation on the Rhino was the T1E2 seen on this M4. This had a more substantial bumper, and the shape of the prongs is a bit different than the more common T1 style. (MHI)

The 3rd Armored Division used its own distinctive style of Rhinoceros, the T2 Douglas device. It can be distinguished by the triangular plates on either side. This particular example is seen fitted to a late production M4A1 formerly configured as a DD Tank as is evident from the turret fittings. (MHI)



This front view of the M4A1 shows the configuration of the Douglas T2 Rhinoceros with the smaller "teeth" in the center. (MHI)

The least common of the Rhinoceros devices was the T3, seen here fitted to a M4A1. This was the flimsiest of the designs and it has also been seen fitted to M10 tank destroyers. (MHI)





There were a number of variations to the Green Dozer design such as the T4 Rhinoceros seen here. This type was not widely seen in use. It was effective in pushing aside brush, but not effective in plowing through the dense base of the hedgerow. (MHI)

Operation Cobra began with a carpet bombing attack of Panzer Lehr Division, which had less than a dozen Panther tanks strung out in a thin defensive belt south of St. Lo. The attack caused heavy casualties among the leading edge of the division as is evident from this overturned Panther.



A M4A1 (76mm) of the 3rd Armored Division fitted with a T2 Douglas device in operations near Reffeuville on 25 July 1944 at the start of Operation Cobra. The new 76mm version of the Sherman tank saw its combat debut during Operation Cobra, with over a hundred allotted to the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions.



A M4A1 (76mm) of Co. D, 66th Armored Regiment, 2nd Armored Division named "Duke" carries an infantry team into action during Operation Cobra. During the first few days of the campaign, it was the practice in the 2nd Armored Division to carry a team of armored infantry on the tanks to assist in the breakthrough. This tank has the new First Army black/olive drab camouflage pattern adopted prior to Operation Cobra.

A M5A1 light tank moves forward in Normandy during Operation Cobra. It is finished in the standard First Army black/olive drab scheme. The tanker manning the .30 cal. light machine gun has stuck a M1 steel helmet over the usual tanker's helmet for head protection. The tanker's normal helmet offered no ballistic protection, and there were many field expedients by US tankers to remedy this problem.



A pair of M5A1 of Co. B, 33rd Armored Regiment, 3rd Armored Division race down a road near Marigny on 26 July 1944. This was part of the Combat Command B spearhead that collided later in the day with a force from 2.SS-Panzer Division.



A M4 tank moves down a road in Normandy on 25 July 1944, the second day of the Operation Cobra offensive when the US armored units began their assault. To the left is an overturned Sd.Kfz 251, probably one of the vehicles from Panzer Lehr Division that was hit in the 24 July 24 carpet bombing attack.



An M2 half-track follows behind a M5A1 light tank through a village near St. Lo on 25 July 1944, the second day of the Operation Cobra breakthrough. The first day, the infantry broke through the German defenses, while on the second day, the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions were injected into the fray to begin the exploitation phase.



The crew of a M8 light armored car named "Danny" scan for German forces after reaching the road-junction in Canisy in the late afternoon of 26 July. They are from the 82nd Recon Bn., CCA, 2nd Armored Division, spearheading the drive southward past the shattered remains of the Panzer Lehr Division which had been carpet bombed two days before.

A M4 passes by a Panther knocked out near La Chapelle during Operation Cobra.



US Army military police direct traffic at an intersection in St. Gilles near the wreckage of two Pz.Kpfw. IV tanks knocked out in the fighting there. Panzer Lehr Division had attempted to defend the junction with four Pz.Kpfw. IV tanks and a StuG III, but they were quickly overwhelmed by 2nd Armored Division.



A M4 tank of the 6th Armored Division speeds through Brehal, France on 27 July 1944. Operation Cobra started on 24 July, and by 27 July, armored units of Patton's Third Army were injected into the west flank of the advance to race for the access roads to Brittany.



A column of M4 tanks of the 6th Armored Division move through Coutances on 29 July during their race into Brittany. This was one of two armored divisions of Patton's newly activated Third Army.



Allied air superiority led the Wehrmacht to pay serious attention to air defense. One of its most effective weapons was the 20mm Flak 38 mounted on the Sd.Kfz. 7 half-track. This is vehicle from the 2.SS-Panzer Division "Das Reich" abandoned in the Roncey pocket and being inspected by some GIs.



A M4 of the 4th Armored Division passes through Coutances in late July 1944. Both the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions were funneled through the town on the way to Avranches, gateway to Brittany.



A M3A1 half-track of the 4th Armored Division passes through Coutances during Operation Cobra in late July 1944.

French townspeople wave enthusiastically as a column from the 4th Armored Division races southward from Coutances in late July 1944. Patton's Third Army pushed down the coastal roads towards Brittany while Bradley's First Army encircled the German panzer formations further east.



A M4 named "Fury" of the 2nd Armored Division on the move with infantry aboard during Operation Cobra. It is finished in the distinctive First Army camouflage scheme of black over olive drab adopted prior to the start of the offensive.



A T2 tank recovery vehicle recovers a M4 medium tank bogged down on a country lane in Normandy. To the right is an abandoned German Sd.Kfz. 251 half-track. Although armored divisions were nominally allotted the newer M32 tank recovery vehicle, many of the older divisions still used the T2 in Normandy, which was based on the M3 medium tank chassis.

A M3 half-track of the 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion is seen here towing a 3-inch anti-tank gun during operations in France in support of the 30th Infantry Division. The 3-inch anti-tank gun was used in the towed tank destroyer battalions. Organic anti-tank units in the infantry divisions used the 57mm anti-tank gun through the end of the war.



A jeep and M4 medium tank of the 6th Armored Division pass through Brehal on 31 July on their way to Brittany. The white triangle on the hull side of the M4 identifies this tank as part of the 68th Tank Battalion, and the tactical number 62 identifies it as Company C which used the numbers 61 to 78.



A column of M4 tanks from the 15th Tank Battalion, 6th Armored Division try to negotiate a large crater in the road caused by mines.

Another view of a column from the 6th Armored Division. Led by a M4 tank, passes through a Norman village on the way to Brittany. The 6th Armored Division used distinctive white tactical "speed" numbers painted on the hull side for radio communication between their tanks.



The clear superiority of the Panther over the Sherman demonstrated in the Normandy fighting led US Army officers to try to develop antidotes. A few captured Panthers were subjected to the fire from various types of weapons at a test field near Isigny, trying to determine the Panther's weak spot.

On 28 July 1944, the commander of the German Seventh Army ordered a retreat towards Percy to avoid encirclement. The direction of the withdrawal was ill-advised, and the 2.SS-Panzer Division became encircled around Roncey. In a series of engagements with 2nd Armored Division and US P-47 fighter bombers, the division lost most of its heavy equipment. Some idea of the carnage on the road back from the road block can be seen in this photo taken outside St. Denis-le-Cast the next day. The abandoned hulks of a number of Sd.Kfz. 251 half-tracks have already been pushed off the road. The second half-track in the column is a Sd.Kfz. 251/7 bridging vehicle from an engineer company of Das Reich. Behind it is a burned-out M4 medium tank of the 67th Armored Regt. destroyed during the night-time battles.





At the head of a retreating column from 2.SS-Panzer Division at the cross roads near Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly was this 150 mm Hummel self-propelled gun named "Clausewitz" and Sd.Kfz. 251 half-track, followed by about 90 other vehicles and 2,500 Waffen-SS troops. It was finally stopped around midnight on 28 July at a 2nd Armored Div. roadblock. The ensuing traffic jam along the hedgerow-lined road left the remainder of the retreating column exposed to American fire, and a savage night-time battle began in which the column was largely destroyed.



This Pz.Kpfw. IV Ausf. J, from 2.SS-Pz. Div. "Das Reich", was knocked out by a 37mm gun mounted on a M2 half-track of the 41st Arm. Inf. Regt. of the 2nd Armored Div. during fighting for St. Denis-le-Gast on 31 July. A tanker from the supporting 67th Armored Regt. points to a hole in the turret side skirts where the 37mm round penetrated.

The Race Across France, August 1944



A M3A1 half-track passes by an abandoned StuG III assault gun during operations near St. German de Tallevende on 13 August 1944. The 17.SS-Pz.Gren.Div. and 2.SS-Pz. Div. "Das Reich" were trapped in the Roncey pocket north of here during Operation Cobra, and this is probably one of the remaining vehicles from the divisions.



A pair of M8 armored cars of Company C, 82nd Recon Bn., 2nd Armored Division pass through the road-junction at St. Sever Calvados on 3 August 1944 during Operation Cobra. They have a machine gun ring mount field mod so commonly seen in Normandy.

While Patton's Third Army was racing to the Seine, Hodge's First Army joined up with the British 21st Army Group around Falaise, trapping most of the surviving German panzer force. This is one of the Panthers lost in the southern sector near American lines in mid-August.



GIs of the 35th Division pass by the wreck of a Pz.Kpfw. IV of Pz.Rgt. 3, 2.Panzer Div. in Pontfarcy on 3 August 1944.



Another Pz.Kpfw. IV of Pz.Rgt. 3, 2.Panzer Div. knocked out in the fighting near Pontfarcy in early August.



GIs walk past an abandoned Flakpanzer 38 (t) of Pz.Rgt. 3, 2.Panzer Division in Tessy-sur-Vire on 3 August 1944.

The encirclement of the Falaise pocket in late August left large quantities of heavy equipment abandoned along the roads. Here, a GI looks over the devastation near Chambois, with a 15cm Panzerwerfer 42 artillery multiple rocket launcher in the background.



A Sd.Kfz. 251 Ausf. D is enveloped in flames after a tank gun hit on the hull front. This German column was hit near Carrouges on 13 August 1944, and is probably one of the units of the 9.Panzer Division which fought against the 5th Armored Division near the Forêt d'Ecouvies in a forlorn attempt to relieve the Falaise pocket.



A Pz.Kpfw. IV of 9. Panzer Division heavily draped with track for extra armored protection, abandoned in Sees in late August during the fighting with the 5th Armored Division.



A M4 105mm assault gun of the 8th Tank Battalion, 4th Armored Division passes through Avranches on its way into Brittany in early August. The 4th and 6th Armored Divisions were the spearheads of Patton's Third Army in its record-breaking drive into Brittany in mid-August. The tanks of the 8th Tank Battalion, unlike most of the division, were camouflaged painted in a splinter camouflage pattern.

The burned out hulk of a M8 light armored car is inspected by curious French townspeople as it rests in the town square of Briey on 14 August 1944. These armored cars were used by cavalry reconnaissance squadrons, and so took on the dangerous task of probing German defense in the vanguard of the attack.



A M5A1 of CCA, 6th Armored Division passes through the town square of Rostrenen in Brittany on the approach to Brest. In the background is a memorial to the fallen soldiers of the First World War.



GIs play a game of cards in Ferte de Mace on 14 August 1944. Behind them is an abandoned Flakpanzer 38 (t). This was one of the more common types of German anti-aircraft armored vehicles seen in the Normandy campaign, consisting of a 20mm anti-aircraft gun on a Pz.Kpfw. 38 (t) chassis.

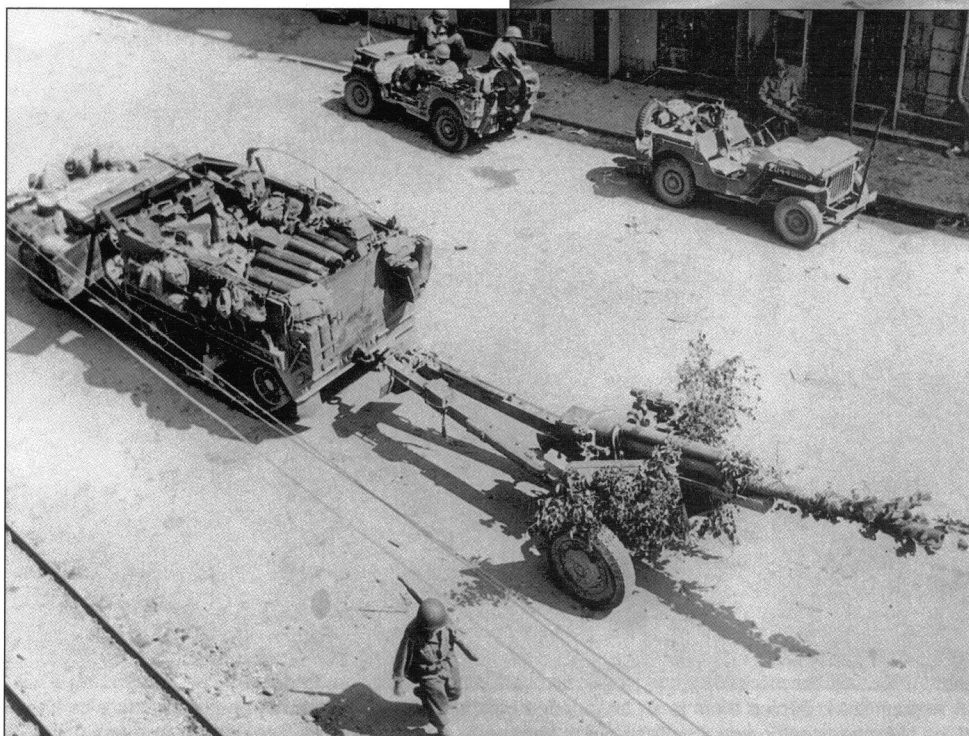


The 2nd Armored Division entered Barenton on the way to Domfront on 7 August 1944. This is a M4A1 (76mm) of the 66th Armored Regiment, one of 51 of these new tanks received by the division in the days before the start of Operation Cobra.

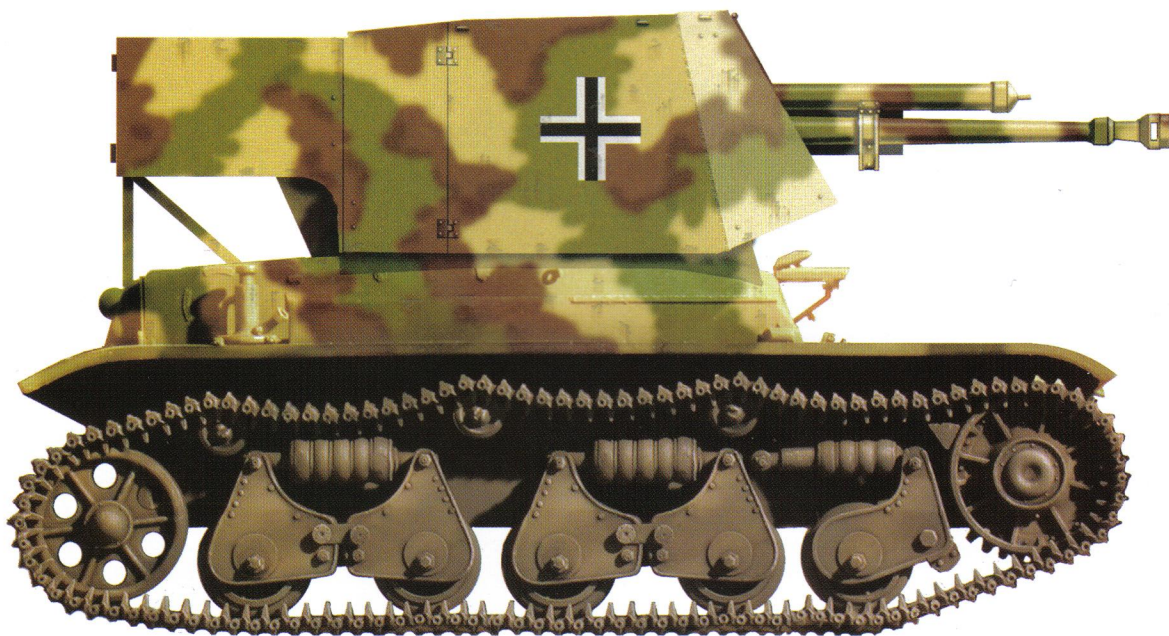


A M5A1 named "Flathead" from the 2nd Armored Division in operation near Domfront on 14 August 1944 as the First Army began its surge towards the Seine river.

A column of M4 medium tanks of the 3rd platoon, Co. B, 8th Tank Battalion, 4th Armored Division pass through the Avranches area on their way into Brittany in early August. This unit used vertical bars to identify the platoons, in this case three vertical bars indicating 3rd platoon. The 8th Tank Battalion made much more extensive use of camouflage than the division's other two tank battalions.

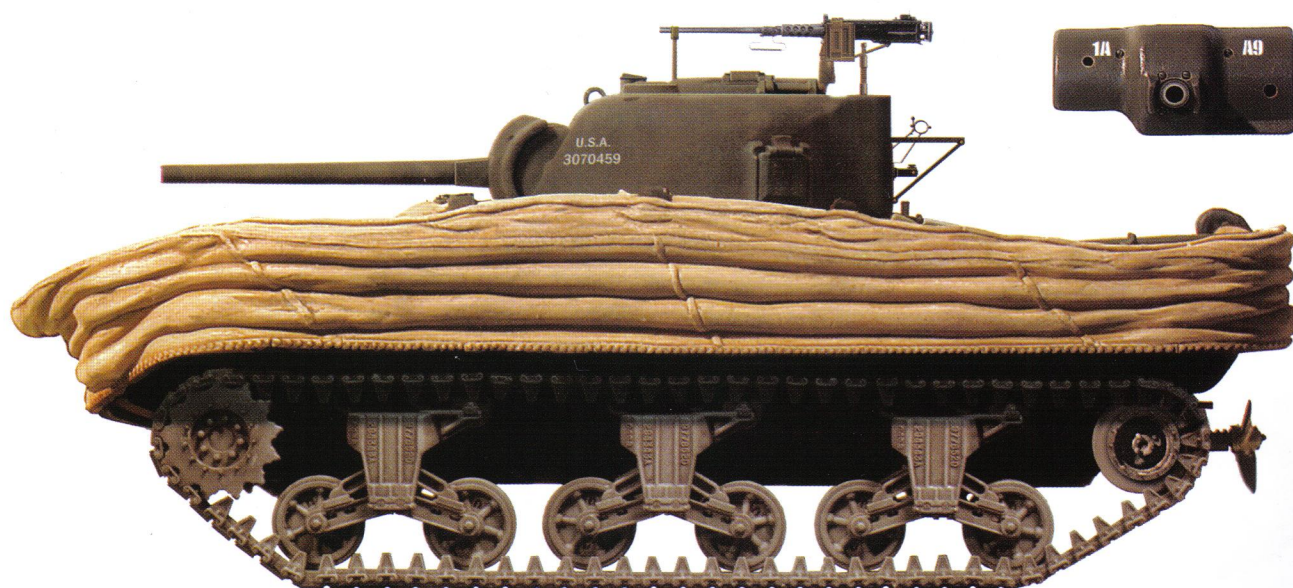


A M3 half-track serves as the tractor for a towed 3-in. anti-tank gun seen here near the Citadel in the port of St. Malo in Brittany during the fighting there in August 1944. The M2 half-track was nominally authorized for towing the 3-inch anti-tank gun, though M3 half-tracks were sometimes substituted.



4.7cm PaK auf Pz.Kpfw. 35R (f), Panzer Abteilung 101, Littry, France 1944

A total of 110 of these converted French Renault tanks were in service in 1944, mainly in Normandy and the Channel Islands. This particular example was with a panzerjäger detachment in the American sector of Normandy. When originally built, they were finished in overall dark gray, but they were repainted in the standard RAL 7028 dark yellow with spray-painted patterns of RAL 6003 olive green and RAL 8017 red brown prior to the 1944 campaign. Since their units were small, they were frequently left without distinctive markings other than the usual German Balkan cross.



M4A1 Duplex Drive, 70th Tank Battalion, Utah Beach, D-Day, 6 June 1944

The Sherman DD tanks were very simply marked on D-Day. Since the canvas screen covered the usual locations for registration numbers, these were painted in a non-standard location, on the front turret sides. Both battalions on Omaha Beach used tank names, and anecdotal accounts suggest they were painted on the turret sides on DD tanks. On the DD tanks of the 70th Tank Battalion, the unit bumper codes were painted on the upper edge of the gun mantlet as seen here on the inset drawing. In many cases, the battalion identification, normally 70^A was missing, and instead, the code began 1A, referring to Bradley's First Army. The vehicle was painted in overall olive drab, but the canvas screen remained in its natural canvas color, somewhat darkened by the use of chemical treatment to seal it against water.



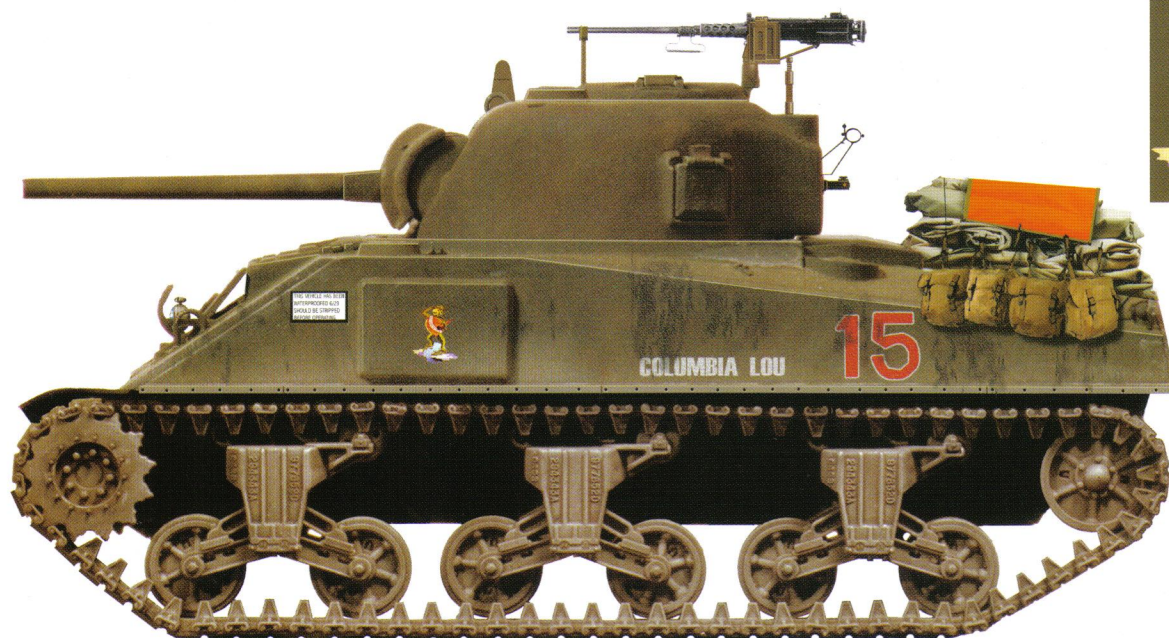
Sd.Kfz. 251/7 Ausf. D Pioneerpanzerwagen, Panzer Lehr Division, St. Lo, July 1944

This combat engineer version of the standard Hanomag half-track served with engineer companies and carried a small treadway bridge to overcome anti-tank ditches and other obstructions. It is finished in the standard RAL 7028 dark yellow with spray-painted patterns of RAL 6003 olive green and RAL 8017 red brown. In many cases, the tactical number was painted both on the hull as well as on a set of planks carried between the two braces for carrying the bridge. However, in this case, the planks are missing. This particular vehicle was one of those abandoned after the carpet bombing that initiated Operation Cobra on 24 July 1944.



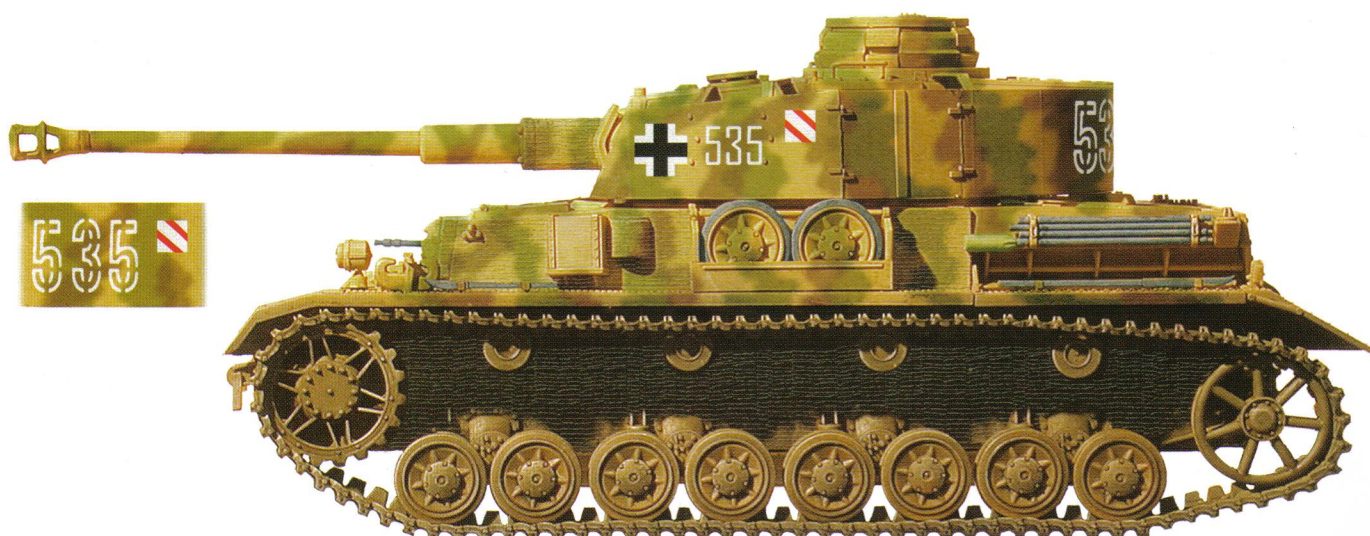
M5A1 Light tank, Co. C, 33rd Armored Regt., 3rd Armored Division, St. Fromand, Normandy, July 1944

After landing in Normandy in late June 1944, the 3rd Armored Division began to adopt the 2nd Armored Division's practice of painting the vehicle speed number on the turret or hull side in chrome yellow. This lasted until Operation Cobra at which time, they were usually over-painted while adopting the black/olive drab camouflage scheme mandated for First Army combat vehicles. This tank carries the other markings typical in Normandy, a tank name, based on the company letter, the vehicle registration number stenciled on the rear side of the hull, and the shipping data stencil on the front of the hull. This tank is painted in the usual US Army olive drab.



M4 Tank, Company C, 70th Tank Battalion, Normandy, July 1944

The 70th Tank Battalion was among the oldest and most combat experienced separate tank battalions in the US Army in the ETO, and so had a greater tendency to employ tactical markings. While preparing for the invasion in England, the battalion adopted the mascot of "Joe Peckerwood" a cartoon figure of a turtle in a tank commander's helmet with a ribbon reading "Soixante-Dix" (Seventy in French) across his chest. This was painted on all the battalion's armored vehicles prior to the landings as a way to distinguish the unit. The 70th Tank Bn. also made use of the practice of painting a large red tactical number on the hull or turret side. The vehicle name was usually painted on the lower center of the hull side as seen here.



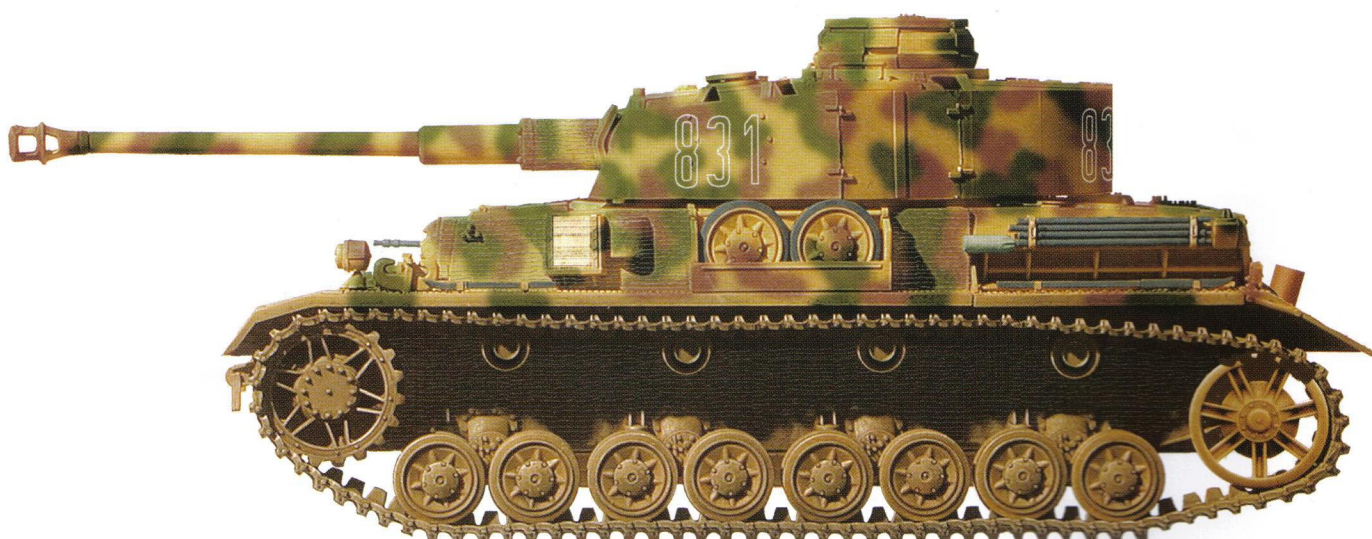
Pz.Kpfw. IV Ausf. H, II/Pz.Rgt. 130, Panzer Lehr Division, August 1944, St. Gilles, France, July 1944

This is a fairly typical example of the camouflage and markings of the 2nd battalion of Panzer Regiment 130, which used a distinctive tactical insignia consisting of two red bands on a white square. This insignia could be seen in at least two variations, as shown here, and rotated ninety degrees. The tactical numbers were usually painted as relatively small numerals on the turret skirt sides, but repeated on the turret rear with a much larger stencil. These tanks were painted in the standard RAL 7028 dark yellow with spray-painted patterns of RAL 6003 olive green and RAL 8017 red brown.



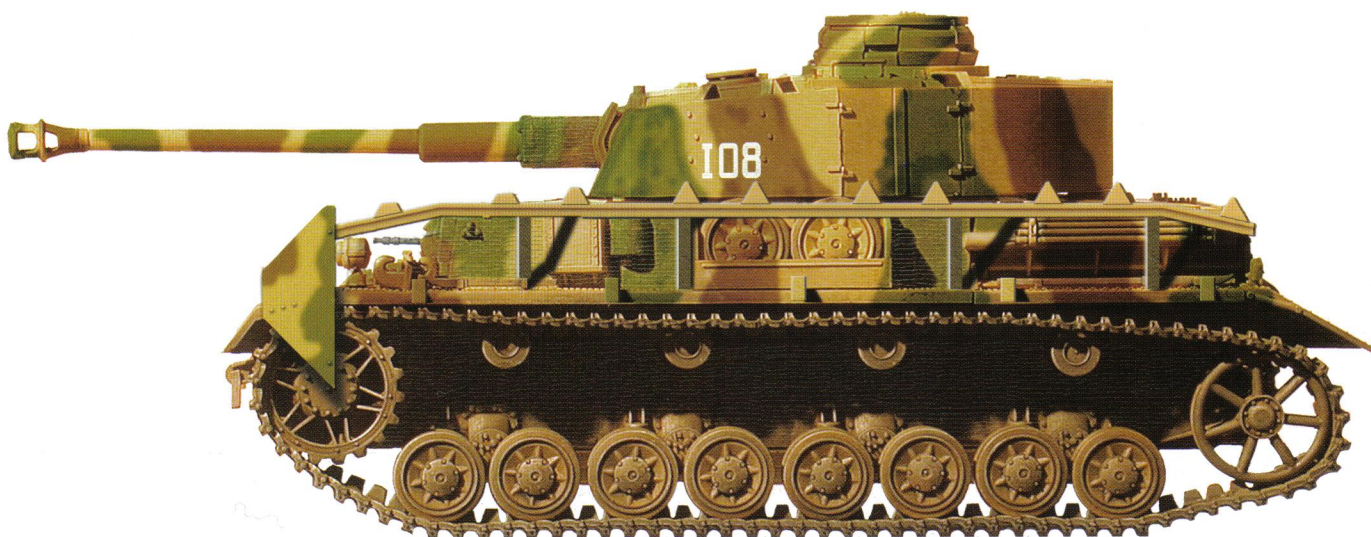
M4 Tank, 8th Tank Battalion, 4th Armored Division, Brittany, France, August 1944

Of the three tank battalions in the 4th Armored Division, the 8th was the most camouflage conscious, and adopted a standard camouflage practice prior to Operation Cobra in late July 1944. Steel rods were welded to the turret to permit branches and foliage to be added for camouflage. In addition, mud camouflage was daubed on to the sides of the tank in a splinter fashion. This battalion also was unique in its use of a set of platoon markings painted on the rear of the hull side, and repeated on the center of the engine access door on the rear. This consisted of a vertical white band, separated into three segments for the 3rd Platoon, or in one or two segments for the first and second.



Pz.Kpfw. IV Ausf. J, 2.SS-Panzer Division "Das Reich", St. Denis-le-Gast, France, 31 July 1944

This Pz.Kpfw. IV is in a fairly typical scheme of RAL 7028 dark yellow with spray-painted patterns of RAL 6003 olive green and RAL 8017 red brown with the tactical number painted simply as a white stencil without the usual black or red fill inside. This particular tank was knocked out by a 37mm gun mounted on a M2 half-track of the 41st Arm. Inf. Regt. of the 2nd Armored Div. on 31 July 1944 during the fighting for the Roncey pocket where most of Das Reich was trapped.



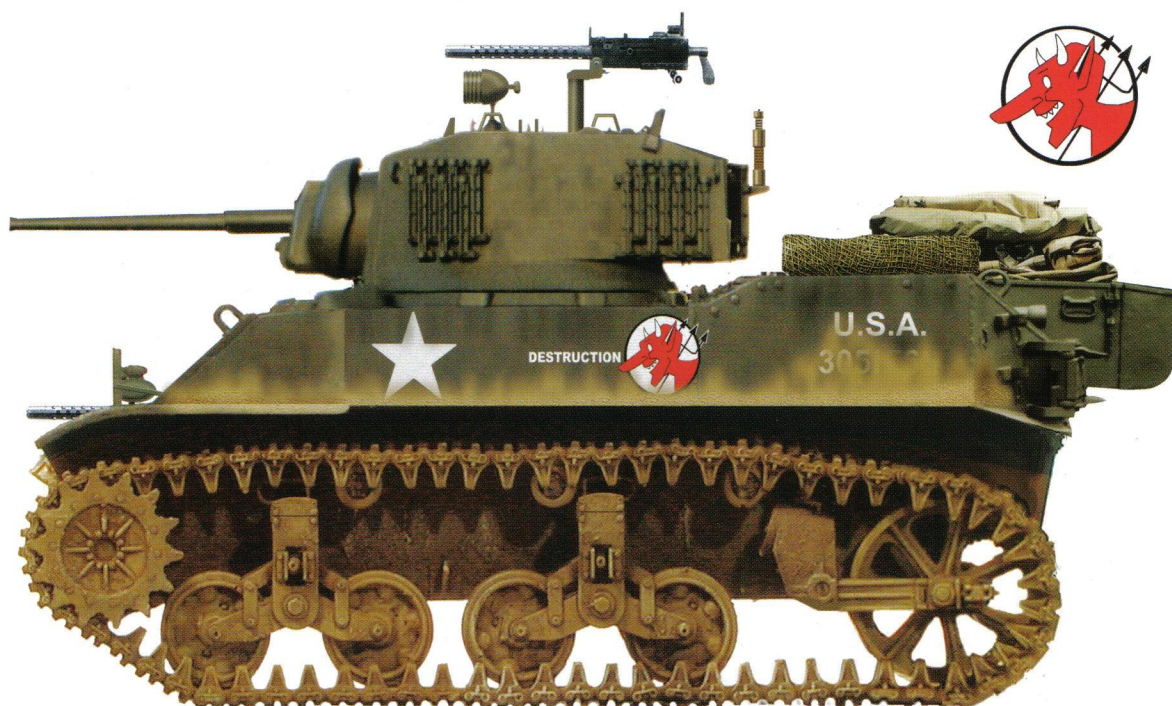
Pz.Kpfw. IV Ausf. J, I/Pz.Rgt. 33, 9.Panzer Division, Marolles, France, August 1944

This Pz.Kpfw. IV was one of two serving in the reconnaissance detachment of the headquarters of the 1st battalion of Panzer Regiment 33 during the fighting around Marolles-les-Brautts and was abandoned in the Rangeard farm near the Chateau de Dangeul during the fighting with the 5th Armored Division in mid-August. It is painted in the standard RAL 7028 dark yellow with spray-painted patterns of RAL 6003 olive green and RAL 8017 red brown. The tactical numbers of the two Pz.Kpfw. IV in the detachment were 107 (knocked out in Guilleterie) and 108 as seen here.



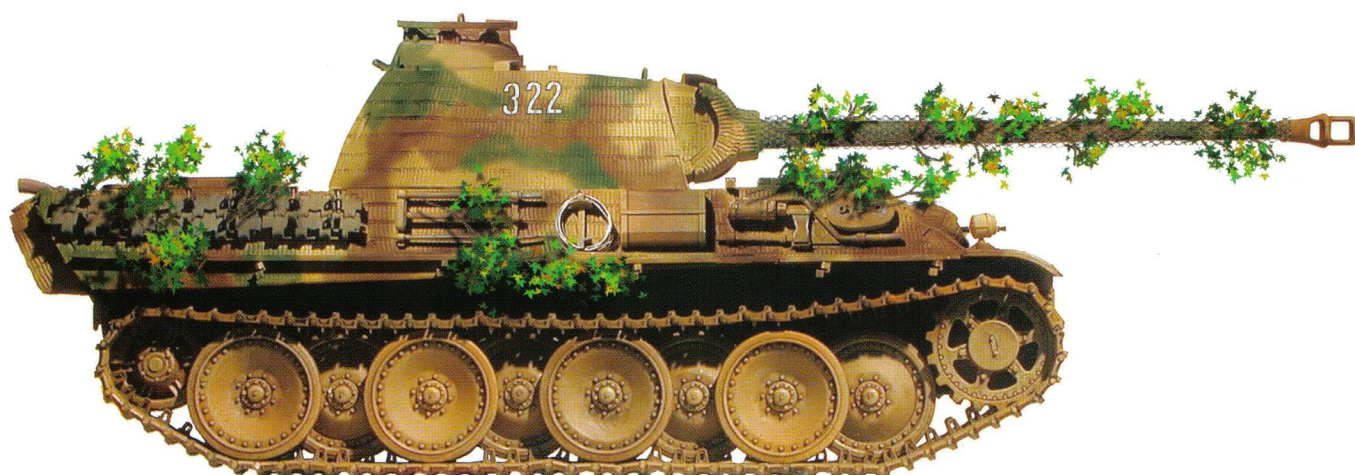
Tiger B, Funk-Lenk Kompanie 316, Chateaudun, France, August 1944

The FLK.316 received six early production Kingtigers, and the unit was attached to Panzer Lehr Regiment 130 during the course of the fighting in France. The tanks were numbered 02, 10, 11, 12, and 13 in large, crudely painted numbers on the front of the turret, as well as on the turret rear. It has the usual zimmerit antimagnetic mine paste, though the pattern is so fine that it is hardly evident on photos of this unit. The camouflage scheme was the standard RAL 7028 dark yellow with spray-painted patterns of RAL 6003 olive green and RAL 8017 red brown. Three of the six Kingtigers were abandoned on the night of 17 August 1944 near Chateaudun due to mechanical problems and the rapid advance of Patton's Third Army, while this particular tank was abandoned on 18 August between Janville and Toury due to mechanical problems.



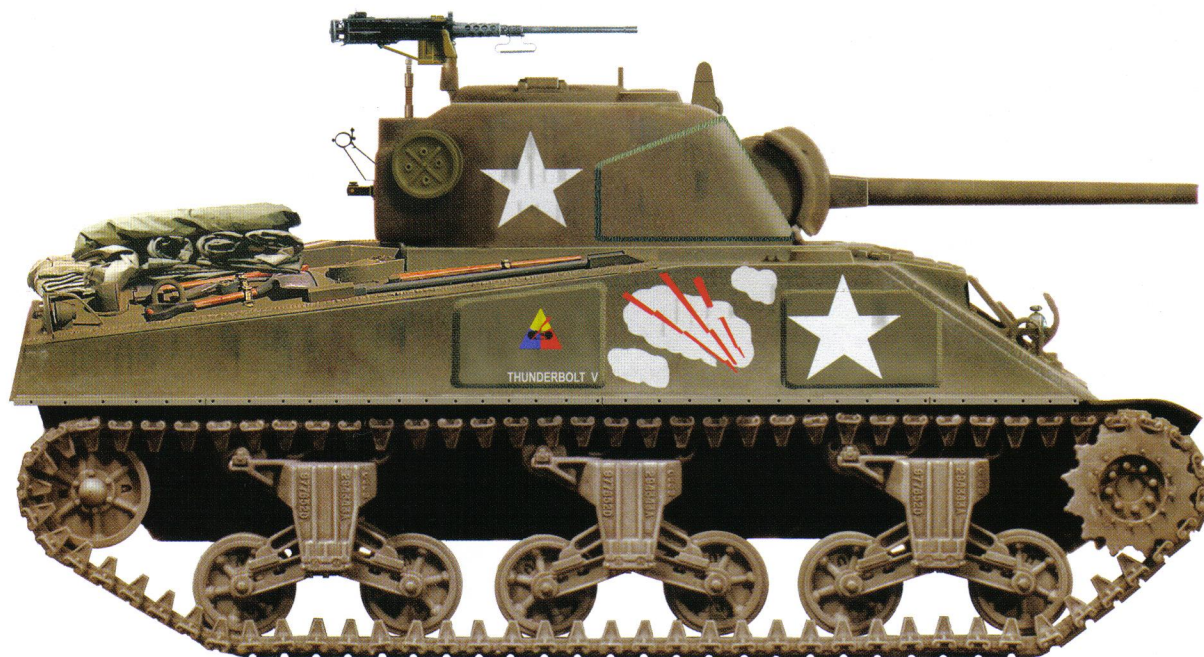
M5A1 Light Tank, 37th Tank Battalion, 4th Armored Division, Lorraine, France, September 1944

Prior to departing for France, most tanks of the 37th Tank Battalion received elaborate cartoon artwork unique to each vehicle. This is a light tank of D Company, so its name begins in D, "Destruction". It has an elaborate devil insignia which is shown in more detail in the inset drawing. Unlike the division's 8th Tank Battalion which favored camouflage and removal of the white Allied star insignia, the 37th Tank Battalion often retained the white star insignia well into the autumn 1944 campaign.



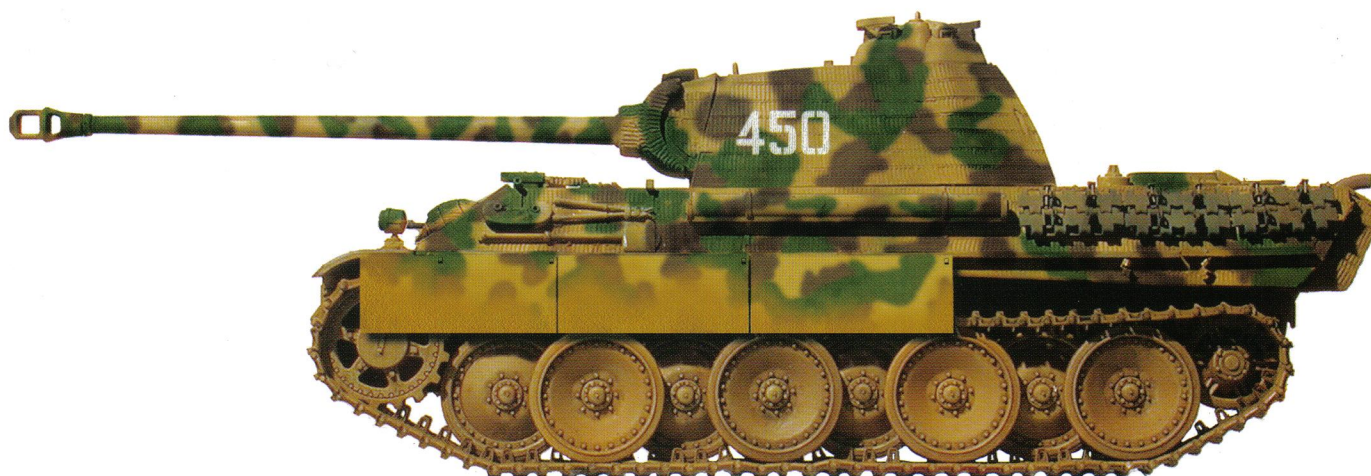
Panther Ausf. G, Panzer Brigade 106 Feldherrnhalle, Lorraine, France, 8 September 1944

These new production Panthers were finished in the standard RAL 7028 dark yellow with spray-painted patterns of RAL 6003 olive green and RAL 8017 red brown. The unit tactical numbers were painted in white with black trim to make them more visible against the zimmerit anti-magnetic mine paste. This tank was one of those knocked out in the encounter with the 90th Division near Mairy on 7-8 September 1944.



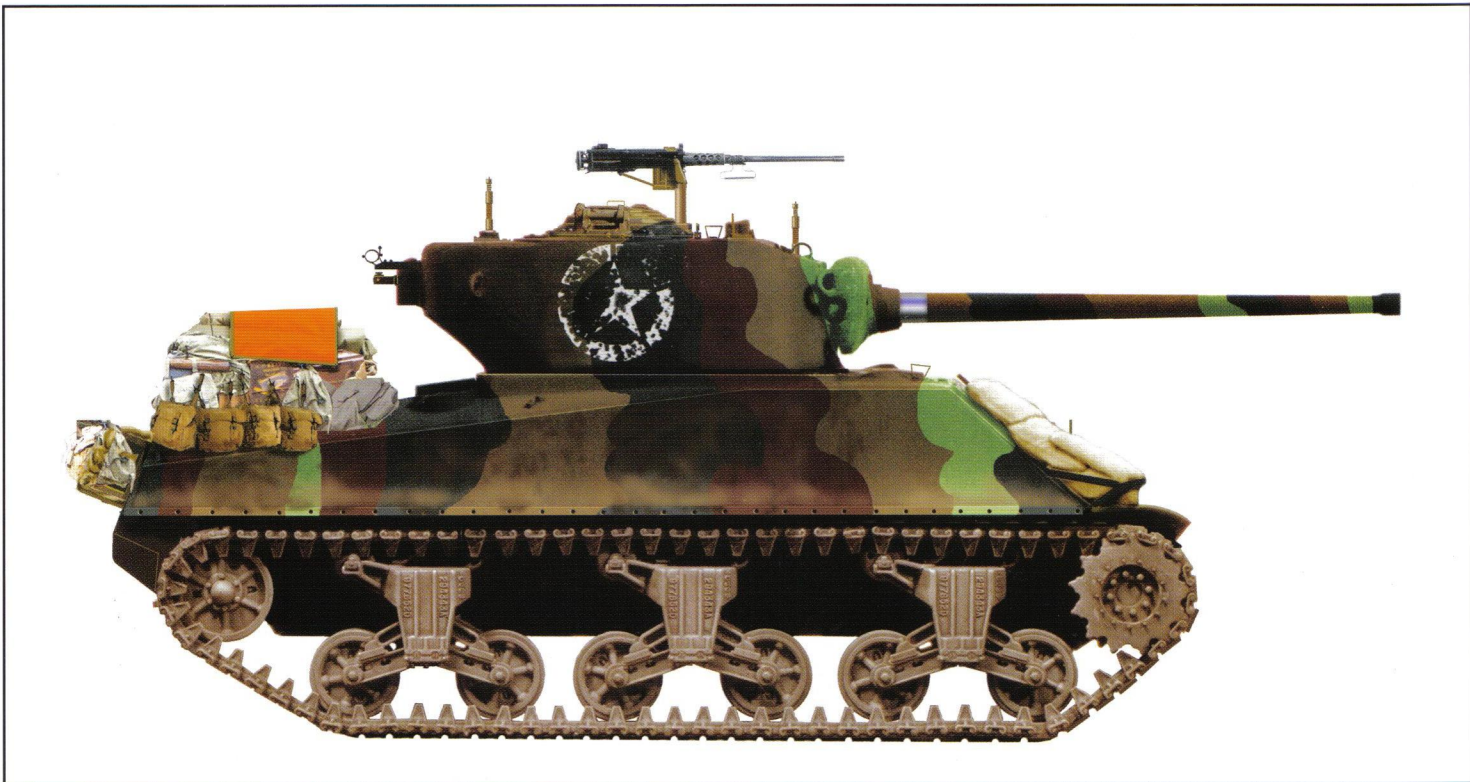
M4 Tank, HQ Company, 37th Tank Battalion, 4th Armored Division, Lorraine, September 1944

This is the command tank of Lt. Col. Creighton Abrams, the highest scoring US tank crew in the ETO, credited with 80 tank kills. Abrams commanded the 37th Tank Battalion during the tank battles around Arracourt. He named his tanks "Thunderbolt" after the symbol on the US Armored Force insignia. His tank M4 carried his trade-mark insignia, a red thunderbolt piercing through white clouds, while the Armored Force symbol was painted behind this along with the tank name. He switched to a M4A3 (76mm) later in the autumn at the request of the Combat Command A commander, Col. Bruce Clarke, and used a M4A3E8 (Thunderbolt VII) in the spring of 1945.



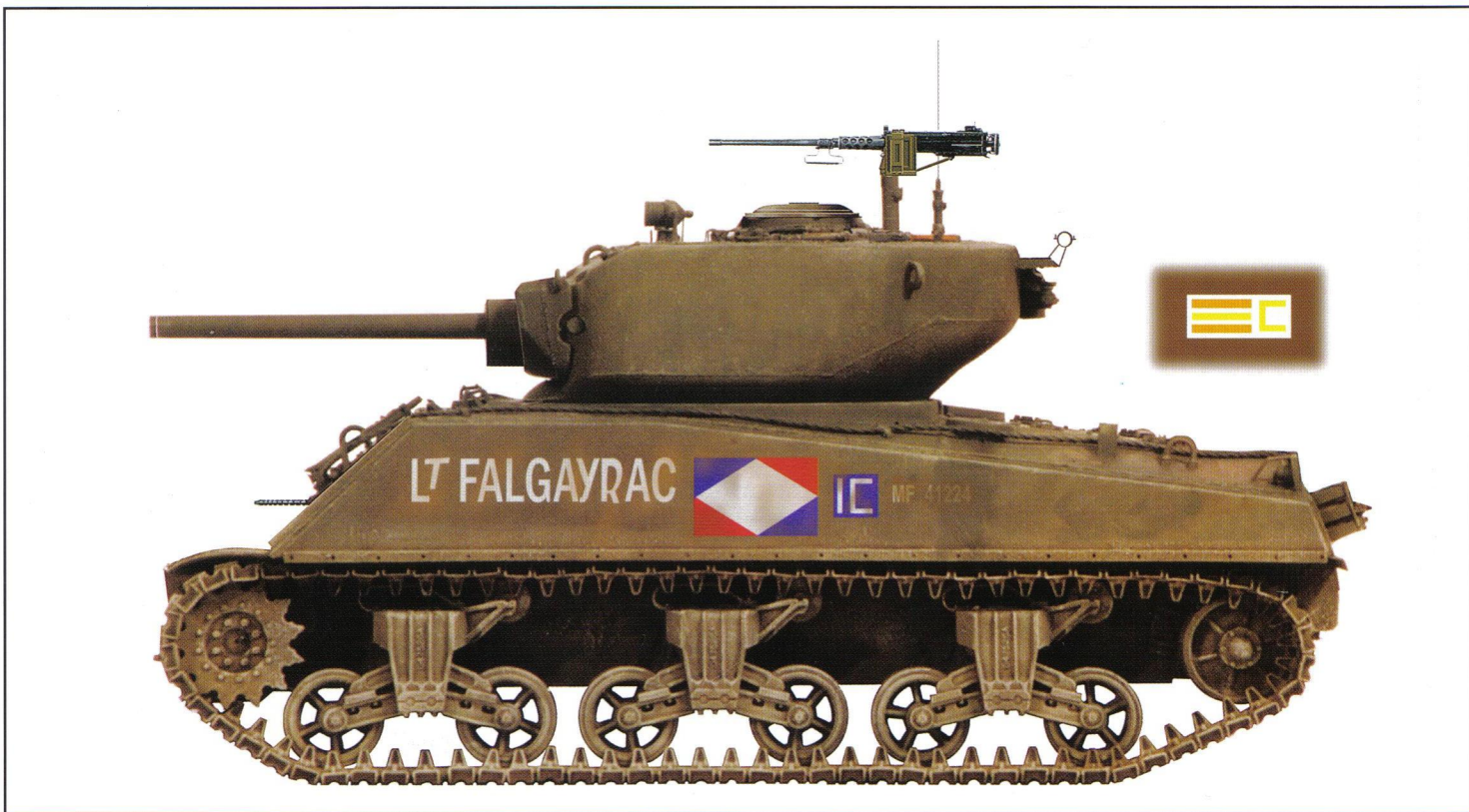
Panther Ausf. G, Panzer Brigade 111, Arracourt, France, September 1944

This is one of the new Panther Ausf. G which took part in the swirling tank battles around Arracourt in mid-September 1944 with the 4th Armored Division. It is finished in the standard RAL 7028 dark yellow with spray-painted patterns of RAL 6003 olive green and RAL 8017 red brown. The insignia is limited to a simple white tactical number on the turret.



M4A3 (76mm) Tank, 14th Armored Division, Alsace, December 1944

This M4A3 is unusual in several respects such as its multi-tone camouflage scheme and the use of a second radio aerial mounted in place of the front turret smoke mortar. From engineer camouflage battalion records, it would appear that the only camouflage paint regularly used in the ETO aside from olive drab was black, earth brown, and light green, which were presumably the colors used here. The circled Allied star, standard in the Seventh Army since Sicily, has been partly scraped off the turret side as it provided an attractive target for German anti-tank gunners.



M4A3E2 Assault Tank, 2e Escadron, 2e Regiment de Chasseurs d'Afrique, 6th Army Group, Alsace, 1945

Very few M4A3E2 assault tanks reached the 6th Army Group in Alsace, and so far as is known, this was the only one issued to any French units. The tank name is painted on the hull side, and behind it the 1804 Napoleononic flag typical of tank units of the First French Army. Behind this is the usual French pattern of tactical marking used to distinguish the subunits within a division. Behind this is the movement code serial, beginning in "MF", but the precise numbers are not distinct on the photo on which this was based. This unit carried the usual Quartermaster shipping marking on the right side of the hull front and rear, with a yellow C and center band and a pumpkin orange upper and lower band, all on a white rectangle.



A M4 tank fitted with a T1 Culin hedgerow cutter moves through Lambezelec on the outskirts of the seaport of Brest in August 1944. It is painted in the black over olive drab camouflage introduced by the First Army in late July 1944.



The rapid advance of US Army through France led Hitler to order a panzer counter-offensive codenamed Operation Luttich in mid-August aimed at Avranches. The attack struck the 30th Infantry Division near Mortain, but was unable to make any significant penetrations into the infantry defenses. This is a panzergrenadier column knocked out during the fighting, with a Sd.Kfz. 251 Ausf. D evident at the rear.



A M4 tank of the 5th Armored Division passes by an abandoned 75mm PaK 40 anti-tank gun during the fighting in Dreux on 16 August 1944, part of Patton's Third Army advance on the cathedral cities of Chartres and Orleans.



A M4A1 from Patton's Third Army crosses the Seine on a treadway pontoon bridge on 26 August 1944. The army censor has obliterated the Culin hedgerow device on the front of the tank as this was considered very secret at the time.

A late production M10 3-in. GMC crosses a treadway pontoon bridge over the Seine river in late August 1944 during the race across France. Patton's Third Army first crossed the Seine south of Paris on the night of 19 August 1944, setting the stage for the liberation of Paris.



A M4 medium tank passes by an abandoned Wehrmacht medical evacuation cart during the operations on the approaches to the Seine river in August 1944. No bumper codes are evident, and the tank may belong to a separate tank battalion supporting one of the infantry divisions during the operations.

A well camouflaged M10 3-in. GMC of the 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion passes by a farm cart during the operations near the seaport of Brest in August 1944. There were three self-propelled tank destroyer battalions active in the Brittany campaign, the 603rd, 644th and the 705th, the first two using the M10 and the last using the M18 76mm GMC.



A column from the 6th Armored Division sits near a cross-roads outside the port city while a column of German prisoners passes by. The M5A1 in the foreground has a cartoon of a mosquito on roller skates and the nickname "Mickey Georgiana", while the M3A1 half-track behind it is named "Zephyr".



US Army camouflage discipline was notoriously poor, but most tank officers thought that camouflage painting was a waste of time. So in the summer of 1944, First Army's 602nd Engineer Camouflage Battalion began developing a method for permanently attaching Sommerfield matting to tanks so that foliage could be easily attached. This is the pilot, a M4 tank of Co. C, 70th Tank Battalion named "Columbia Lou".



This is a demonstration of how the Sommerfield matting was intended to be used once foliage was attached.

Operation Dragoon, August 1944

On 15 August 1944, the US Seventh Army landed on the Riviera coast of southern France, opening a second front against the Wehrmacht in France. This is a M4 tank of Co. B, 756th Tank Battalion, a veteran of the Italian campaign, in La Lavandou shortly after the landings.



A total of 36 M4A1 Duplex Drive tanks were used again during Operation Dragoon in southern France with the 191st, 753rd, and 756th Tank Battalions. This is a M4A1 DD tank of the 756th Tank Battalion on Alpha beach near St. Tropez which was supporting the 3rd Infantry Division.



The Wehrmacht fortified the major ports along the Mediterranean coast, and a typical type of beach defense work was the use of obsolete tank turrets mounted on underground concrete bunkers. This example of a *Bauform 235 panzerstellung* near the Marseilles dock uses an APX-R turret of the type used on French Renault R-35 and Hotchkiss H-39 tanks.



This is another example of a German *Bauform 237 panzerstellung* tank bunker in Marseilles, this time using the turret from a Pz.Kpfw. II tank.



This is another example of a *Bauform 237 panzerstellung* using a Pz.Kpfw. II turret located along the waterfront in Marseilles during the fighting there in August 1944.



A M4A1 from the 756th Tank Battalion supporting the 3rd Infantry Division advances past the burned wreckage of a retreating German column during the assault towards the ports of Marseilles and Toulon. French forces seized the ports while the 3rd Division covered their flank near Aubagne. This is probably the large German truck column destroyed during the advance towards Montelimar.



Another view of a M4A1 tank of the 756th Tank Battalion during operations near the Mediterranean ports in late August 1944. The camouflage and markings of the Seventh Army units reflected Italian campaign practices, such as the large Allied stars on the turrets.



A GI looks into the burnt hulk of a M4A1 tank of the 753rd Tank Battalion knocked out in the fighting with the 11. Panzer Division near Grane on 28 August 1944. This is an older Sherman, typical of the veterans of the Italian campaign like the 753rd Tank Battalion.

Battle of the Borders, September 1944

French townspeople swarm over an armored column from the 3rd Armored Division in Mauberge near the Belgian frontier on 2 September 1944. The tank at the right is one of the new M4A1 (76mm). The following day, the division reached Mons in Belgium, setting the stage for the encirclement of the Mons pocket.



A M8 light armored car leads the way over the French-Belgian border on 2 September 1944. The rapid advance into Belgium trapped many German units that had previously escaped encirclement at Falaise and on the Seine river.

A M4 from Task Force Taylor enters the Belgian town of Le Cateau on 4 September 1944 as part of the V Corps drive into Belgium that eventually trapped retreating German units in the Mons pocket.





A M4 tank crosses a treadway pontoon bridge over the Mouse river in Belgium near Namur on 8 September 1944 during the rapid advance to the German frontier. It is finished in the First Army scheme of black over olive drab.



Operation Market-Garden in the Netherlands included the airdrop of two US airborne divisions to support the British assault. This is the Panther Befelspanzer of Maj. Hans-Albrecht von Pluskow, commander of the tank battalion of Panzer Brigade 107, knocked out in an engagement with a British Sherman from the 44th RTR near Erp on 23 September while supporting the 101st Airborne Division.

A company of M4 medium tanks from Patton's Third Army provides indirect fire support for operations near the Moselle river in September 1944.



A M7 105mm HMC of Battery B, 66th AFAB, 4th Armored Division moves over a treadway bridge during operations along the Moselle in Lorraine. The crew has mounted a shelf over the transmission cover to hold personal gear.

A M4A3 medium tank of the 737th Tank Battalion fires on buildings near Dombasle, along the left flank of the advance along the Moselle river near Nancy on 15 September 1944 in support of the 320th Infantry which was crossing a nearby canal at the time.





In mid-September, Hitler ordered that four of the new panzer brigades cut off the spearhead of Patton's Third Army east of Nancy in a classic envelopment battle. Panzer Brigade 106 *Feldherrnhalle*, led by the legendary panzer commander Franz Bake, started off the Lorraine panzer counter-offensive on the night of 7-8 September 1944, attempting to cut off the 90th Division near Mairy, France. The attack was a shambles and by the end of the day the brigade had been decimated losing most of its equipment including 21 of its tanks and tank destroyers, sixty of its Sd.Kfz. 250 and 251 half-tracks, and more than 100 support vehicles. This is one of its Panther Ausf. G tanks abandoned after the fighting and left by the roadside west of Metz for a few weeks for improvised vehicle recognition training for passing US troops.



A GI from the 90th Infantry division inspects some of the German equipment captured by the division during the fighting with Pz.Brig. 106 near Mairy. These are both armed versions of the standard German Hanomag Sd.Kfz. 251 Ausf. D armored infantry half-track. A Sd.Kfz. 251/21 anti-aircraft vehicle with a triple MG151 cannon mounting is seen to the left. The Pz.Gren. Battalion 2106 had ten of the Sd.Kfz. 251/9 "Stummel" assault gun armed with a close support 75mm howitzer seen on the right.



The second unit to attack in Lorraine was Panzer Brigade 112 which deployed its Panther battalion in Dompierre on the night of 12 September. A combat command of the more experienced French 2nd Armored Division beat up the brigade on 13 September 1944, and in two days of fighting it had only 21 operational tanks out of its original 80. This Panther was captured by the French intact and for many years was displayed in Paris in front of Les Invalides.

On 19 September, Panzer Brigade 113 launched an attack against elements of the 4th Armored Division near Arracourt, and first ran into the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion near Rechicourt-la-Petite. A short range duel in the early morning fog led to the loss of several Panther Ausf. G and M18 Hellcat tank destroyers. These are two of the Panther Ausf. Gs knocked out during the skirmish. (Patton Museum)

In 1945, one of the veterans of the 704th Tank destroyer Battalion returned to the Arracourt area and photographed several of the Panther tanks still lying abandoned around the battlefield. This is a Panther Ausf. A which most likely belonged to one of the panzer divisions which took part in the later phases of the battle, possibly 11. Panzer Division. The new panzer brigades were equipped with the newer Panther Ausf. G. (Patton Museum)





In September 1944, the 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion had its maintenance personnel attach improvised 5/8 inch steel folding covers over the turret roof of about half of its M10 tank destroyers to provide a measure of protection against small arms fire. The M10 tank destroyers with the late production turret had a full kit added which included folding armored flaps over the rear of the fighting compartment as seen here.



As seen here, the two rear panels on the late-production M10 tanks destroyers could be folded forward if necessary for the crew to enter or exit the vehicle.



The crew of a M8 light armored car is greeted by friars from a local monastery in Maarland, the Netherlands in September 1944.



The M10 tank destroyers with the mid-production turrets had only the front portion of the armor kit added, as the roof opening was not sufficient to permit the full kit. This is an example from the 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion in Soultz, France on 14 January 1945.



The various types of Rhino hedge cutters remained on many tanks into the autumn campaign like this example of a T1 Culin device on a M4 operating near the Luxembourg frontier in September 1944. It is followed by a M10 tank destroyer.

Alsace-Lorraine, October 1944



During the attempts by Patton's Third Army to overcome the fortifications around Metz, the 735th Tank Battalion made one of the few uses of the M2 demolition snake in combat. This consisted of up to four hundred feet of explosive-packed tubing that was pushed in front of the tank and detonated to blow gaps in minefields. Of the four Snakes pushed against Fort Driant on 31 October, three broke up on the approach to the fort, and the last failed immediately short of the fort. This shows the assembly of one of the Snakes on 2 October near Gorz.

This shows the appearance of the front end of the M2 demolition snake which is being welded on near Gorz, France on 2 October. The front section was intended to make it easier to push the demolition device in front of the tank, but the system proved to be very unwieldy. No Snakes were successfully used in the fighting, even though there were experiments in using Snakes to breach Dragon's Teeth obstacles along the Siegfried line.

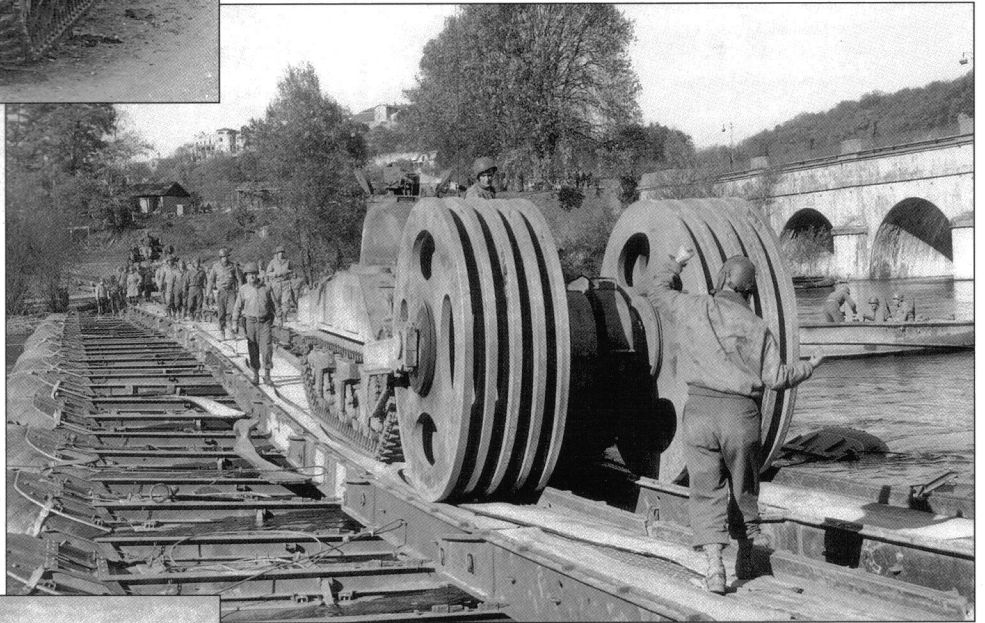


The most common method used by the US Army in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) for rapidly breaching minefields was the use of mine-rollers like this T1E3 near Nancy on 11 October 1944. They were first used in combat by the 6th Armored Division in July 1944, but there was no extensive use until the fall of 1944.



A M4A1 of the 756th Tank Battalion knocked out during the fighting in Vagney, France on 8 October 1944. This is a tank from the early production batch of about 250 M4A1s with the direct vision ports for the driver. Like many veterans of the Italian campaign, the 756th Tank Battalion had a large number of old tanks when it arrived in southern France.

The 6th Armored Division was the first US unit to use the T1E3 mine-roller and this example is seen being carefully driven over a pontoon treadway bridge near Liverdun, France by the 25th Armored Engineer Battalion in October 1944.



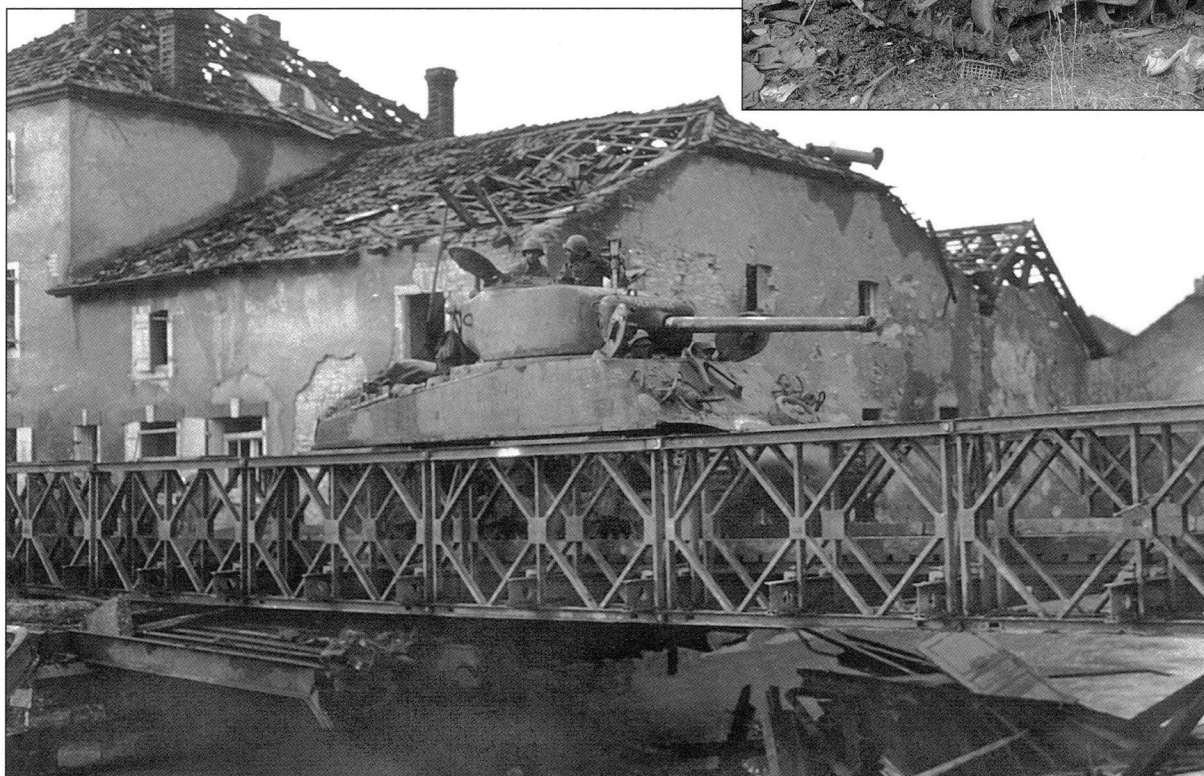
By fall, an increasing percentage of Panthers encountered by the US Army were the new Ausf. G variant. This is an example knocked out during the fighting near Ploy and photographed on 14 October 1944.

During the campaign along the Meurthe river, the 21. Panzer Division was committed against the US Seventh Army in October. This is a pair of Panthers of the division knocked out near Autry, France in a tank battle with US forces in late October.



War in the Vosges, November 1944

A M4A1 of the Seventh Army knocked out near La Salle, France on 3 November 1944. The GI points to where the German anti-tank gun penetrated the hull armor which then passed through the turret race. This is an early production M4A1 with the early pattern bogie assemblies. The Seventh Army consisted of units which had fought in 1943 in the Italian theater, and so had a large amount of older equipment.



A M4A3 (76mm) of Co. A, 761st Tank Battalion (Cld) passes over a Bailey bridge in Vic-sur-Seille on 9 November 1944 during operations by Patton's Third Army in Lorraine. The 761st Tank Battalion was one of two segregated African American tank battalions that served in the ETO, and the most highly decorated.



The 6th Armored Division received a number of M4A3E2 assault tanks in November, and this one was hit with six 88mm rounds during fighting near Neid, France on 16 November 1944. It is seen here being repaired by divisional maintenance crews. (Patton Museum)



A M4 tank is covered in a fresh coat of wet snow on a road side near Belmont, France after having run over a mine on 12 November 1944. The tank has already been roped off by engineers with white cloth tape, the usual precaution in mined areas.

During mid-November, Patton's Third Army fought a series of engagements with the 11. Panzer Division in Lorraine, east of Chateau Salins. The 4th Armored Division engaged in a series of savage tank battles starting on 14 November near Guebling. There was additional fighting near Guebling on 19 November when the 761st Tank Battalion, was supporting the 26th Infantry Division in the area. This is a scene along the road between Guebling and Bougaistrof showing three knocked out Panther Ausf. G and a Sd.Kfz. 250 of 11. Panzer Division, while in the foreground is a M4A3 (76mm) named "All Hell" of Co. A, 761st Tank Battalion.



This is a view of the same scene from the opposite direction, showing three of the knocked out Panthers from the 11. Panzer Division near Guebling.



A M10 3-in. GMC with XV Corps during the fighting on the approaches to Sarrebourg in late November 1944. This may be one of the M10s of the RBFM, the tank destroyer battalion of the French 2nd Armored Division, which was the main armored element of the attack.



A rare example of a late production Sd.Kfz. 251/17 half-track armed with 2cm KwK 38 is seen knocked out in the ruins of La Bourgence during the fighting with the 3rd Infantry Division on 15 November 1944 in the Vosges mountains.

On 17 November 1944, the crewman of a M4A3 (76mm) tank of the 712th Tank Battalion, perform a "show and tell" for a Signal Corps photographer showing how a German *panzerschreck* rocket launcher knocked out their tank near Metzervisse. The crewman on the right is showing the small penetration hole caused by the rocket's shaped charge warhead.



A M10 from a tank destroyer battalion of Patton's Third Army near Fort Königsmacker in the Metz defensive belt on 21 November 1944. This unit was supporting the 90th Division and Task Force Bacon during the final assault on Metz, where resistance finally collapsed the next day, 22 November 1944 after having held out for almost two months. This vehicle appears to have an armored roof fitted over the rear of the turret, but it is obscured by the tarp.



US troops advance through the outskirts of Metz as the German defenses were in the final stage of collapse after two months of determined resistance. Behind the GI is a M8 light armored car and an abandoned 88mm PaK 43 anti-tank gun.

The Flakpanzer IV Wirbelwind was a quadruple 20mm Flak 38 mounted in an open turret on Pz.Kpfw. IV hulls. These were first deployed in France in the late summer of 1944, and this example was knocked out during the fighting around Metz.



This Sd.Kfz. 251 Ausf. D from Aufklärung Abt. 11, 11.Panzer Division was knocked out in the fighting for Grostenquin on 19 November by CCB, 6th Armored Division during the fighting along the Maginot line.



A Panzerjäger 38 (t) Ausf. M Marder III of Pz.Jäger Abt. 61 of 11.Panzer Division knocked out in the fighting with the 6th Armored Division on 22 November 1944 near St. Jean Rohrbach.

A Jagdpanzer IV from 11.Panzer Division knocked out in the fighting with the 6th Armored Division near St. Jean Rohrbach on 22 November 1944. The gun mantlet was knocked off by a tank gun hit.



GIs from Co. B, 114th Infantry, 44th Division hop aboard M5A1 light tanks of the 749th Tank Battalion in Struth, France on 28 November 1944 following the fall of Sarrebourg. By this stage, the sandbags added to the glacis plate have become a heap of mud from the wet weather.



A pair of French M4A2 tanks of the French 1st Armored Division fire on German defenders near the Lefevre Caserne in Mulhouse on 23 November 1944 during the attack of the 1st French Army beyond Belfort. Obscured by the smoke is a M7 105mm HMC in the background in front of the two tanks.



The M4 named "Brive-la-Gaillarde" of Lt. Krebs, leader of the 3rd platoon, 3rd squadron, 12th Cuirassiers, French 2nd Armored Division passing through the Alsatian city of Strasbourg on 25 November 1944. It carries the distinctive cross-of-Lorraine insignia unique to this division. This division always fought in US armies, in this case with Patch's Seventh Army. The other French armored divisions of the First French Army carried the 1804 Napoleonic flag instead.



A GI looks over a M4 tank of the 756th Tank Battalion knocked out by a German StuG III during an engagement near Mutzig on 26 November 1944 while supporting Task Force Whirlwind from the 3rd Division.

Winter in Alsace, December 1944



A good study of a M18 76mm GMC of Co. B, 827th Tank Destroyer Battalion in Saarbourg, France on 1 December 1944. This vehicle uses its Quartermaster shipping code, 9609-V, instead of the usual numeric bumper code as its battalion unit marking on the hull front.



A column of M4A3 tanks from Combat Command A, 14th Armored Division halts in the Alsatian village of Scherwiller on 2 December during the Seventh Army assault towards the city of Selestat. These are late production vehicles with the oval loader's hatch and the commander's all-round vision cupola.



The crew of a M18 76mm GMC of the 602nd Tank Destroyer Battalion load ammunition in Saar-Union on 2 December 1944. The ammunition came packed in black fiber-board containers and the crew can be seen removing them from the tubes to load in the ammunition racks inside the M18.



On 23 November 1944, Panzer Lehr Division began a counter-attack from Sarre-Union against the Seventh Army and hitting two regiments of the 44th Division. This Panther Ausf. G was knocked out during the fighting near Schallbach on 25 November with the 114th Infantry. There is a bazooka hit evident on the hull side immediately below the turret. The Panzer Lehr was forced to abandon the attack when 4th Armored Division launched a flank attack with its Combat Command B from Fenetrangle.



A M4A3 (76mm) of the 191st Tank Battalion passes by the wrecked "Gasthaus zu Fussball" (Football hotel) along the Strasbourg-Hagenau road on 9 December 1944 while supporting the 79th Infantry Division.



A M4A3 (76mm) tank of the 191st Tank Battalion supports infantry of the 79th Division during the fighting for the town of Hagenau north of Strasbourg on 10 December 1944, part of a broader VI Corps offensive in Alsace.



A late production M10 3-in. GMC of the 773rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, Patton's Third Army crosses the Saar river over a treadway bridge on 12 December 1944. While much of Patton's Third Army was fighting around Bastogne, the XX Corps remained in the Saar river area in preparation for a later offensive into Germany. This particular M10 has a metal cover over the turret rear and pipes welded to the four corners of the hull to attach stakes for camouflage.

An M8 armored car troop from the 92nd CRSM, 12th Armored Division, uses an abandoned fortress from the Maginot line near Guising, France for a bivouac on 13 December 1944. Half-tracks, like the M3A1 here, were used in the squadron's maintenance and supply sections.



A M4A3 named "Buckland Beauty" of Co. B, 23rd Tank Battalion, 12th Armored Division is recovered by a pair of M32 tank recovery vehicles after having slipped down into a muddy crater near Guising, France on 15 December 1944.

A M4A3 (76mm) supports infantry from the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion, 14th Armored Division during operations near Ober Otterbach on 18 December 1944. The M4A3 is unusual in several respects such as its multi-tone camouflage scheme and the use of a second radio aerial mounted in place of the front turret smoke mortar.



The wreckage of a German Sd.Kfz. 251/21 is seen near Keintzheim on 20 December 1944. It was knocked out during fighting with the French 5th Armored Division during the fighting for the town on 17-18 December. It probably was from Panzer Brigade 106 which was fighting in the area at the time. This photo clearly shows the triple automatic cannon mount that distinguished this version of the Hanomag half-track.

A M4 tank named "Pornoue" from CC5 of the French 5th Armored Division in the ruins of Kientzheim on 20 December 1944 after three days of hard fighting for the town with Panzer Brigade 106. Many of the tanks of the division were whitewashed in the ensuing days during a lull in the fighting.



Operation Nordwind, January 1945

This Jagd.Pz. 38 (t) was knocked out near Kilstett during the fighting in the north-east suburbs of Strasbourg in January 1945, probably from PzJäger Btn. 1553, attached to the 553.Volksgrenadier Div. which attacked the town on 5 January 1945 as part of Operation Nordwind. A large chunk of armor has been blown off the front corner, testament to the thin armor plate on the hull side.



US tank units were taking so many casualties to German infantry panzerfaust rocket launchers that various expedients were tested to defend against them. After having seen German tanks fitted with screened skirts, US Army ordnance officers tested the idea of using screens for panzerfaust protection. But as shown here in a test against a captured Pz.Kpfw. IV near Sarrebourg on 2 January 1945, the screens were completely ineffective in defending against shaped charge warheads.



A group of M4A1 tanks of the 753rd Tank Battalion attached to the 36th Division in the town square of Lauterbourg in early January prior to the withdrawal caused by the attack of the 39.Panzer Army during Operation Nordwind.



A M5A1 of the 749th Tank Battalion drives past an entrenched GI of the 44th Division with a .30 cal Browning machine gun during the fighting in Alsace in January 1945. The M5A1 is from the initial production batch fitted with the rare early turret which had an armored cover on the turret side where an opening port had been located on the earlier M3A3 turret.

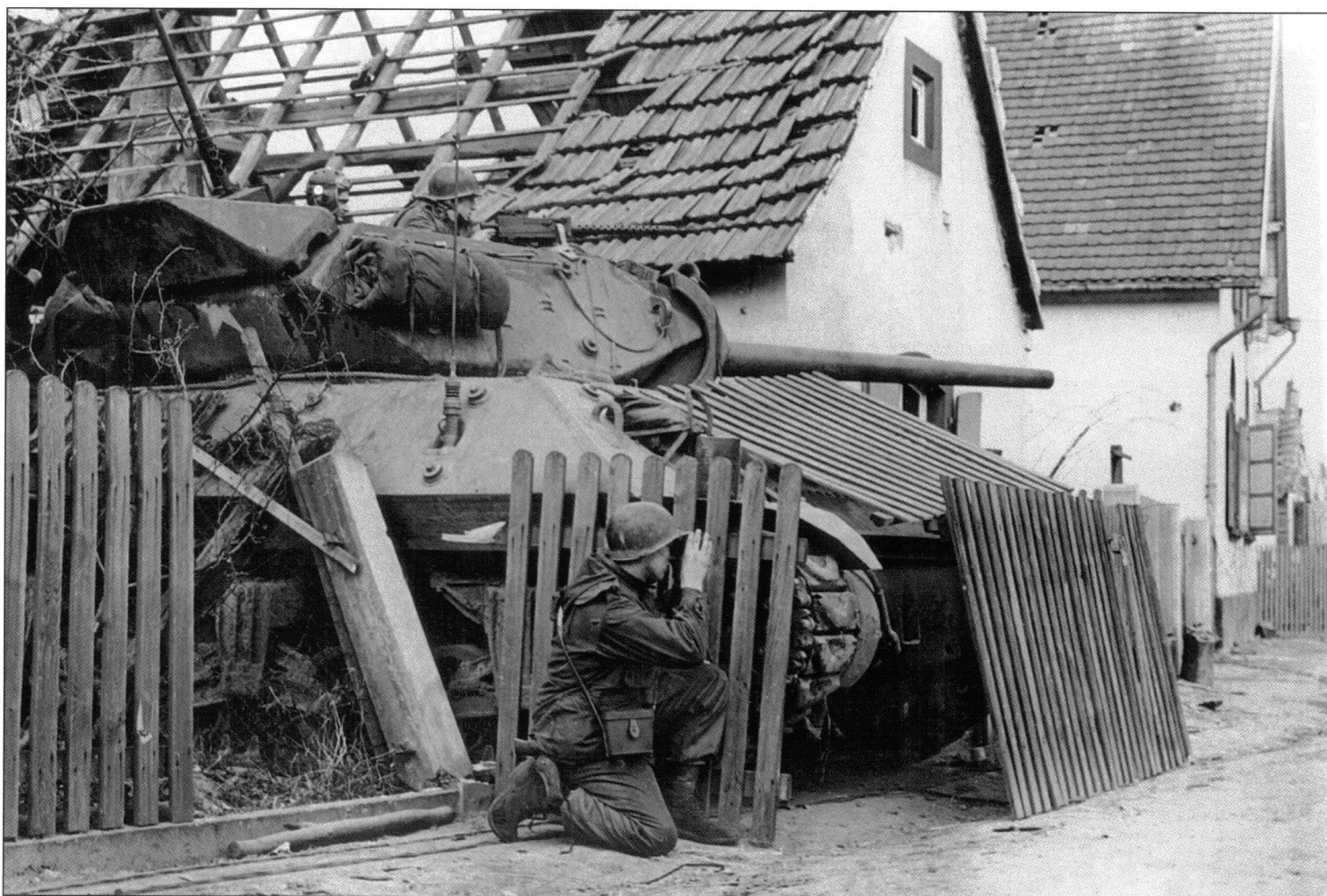
A M5A1 light tank passes a truck load of German prisoners during the fighting near Strasbourg in January 1945.



Co. A, 23rd Tank Battalion, 12th Armored Division provide indirect fire support during operations near Gabsheim in early January 1945. Later in the month, the inexperienced division was given a rough time in a sharp encounter with the 10.SS-Pz.Div. in which the 43rd Tank Battalion was wiped out near Herrlisheim on 17 January 1945.

On 5 January 1945, a few Jagdtigers from sch. Pz.Jg. Abt. 653, accompanied by a captured M4 medium tank, supported the panzergrenadiers during an attack near Rimling, France. A M36 90mm GMC from the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion carefully moved into a flanking position and at a range of 900 yards, put a single armor piercing round into the side of Jagdtiger number 134, causing an internal ammunition fire which destroyed the vehicle in a catastrophic explosion, blowing off the superstructure sides.





A mid-production M10 3-in. GMC of Patch's Seventh Army uses some fencing to provide improvised camouflage during the fighting along the border between Alsace and Germany on 24 January 1945.



A column from Co. C, 142nd Infantry, 36th Division led by a M4A3 (76mm) tank moves through a snowy field near Dossenheim, France between Saverne and Strasbourg on 29 January 1945 during the actions to recover ground lost during the German Nordwind offensive in Alsace. The tanks are probably from the 14th Armored Division, which was supporting the 36th Division in its attacks on the Gabsheim bridgehead.



A column of armor, probably from the 14th Armored Division, operating near Hagenau in January 1945. The tanks are painted in a disruptive scheme of whitewash over the usual olive drab.



One of the more curious vehicles captured by the 75th Division during the fighting near Ostheim on 31 January 1945 was this Hotchkiss H-39 light tank, known in German service as the Pz.Kpfw. 38H 735(f). These were most commonly seen in units fighting against partisans, but small numbers still remained in service at the beginning of 1945.

Approaches to the Westwall, February-March 1945



A GI from the 142nd Infantry, passes by a M4A3 (76mm) tank knocked out in Oberhoffen when the 36th Division attacked the town on the night of 31 January-1 February. The town was bitterly defended by the 257. Volksgrenadier Division.



A white-washed M5A1 light tank of the 714th Tank Battalion, 12th Armored Division drives through Colmar on 3 February 1945.



A pair of M4A3 tanks from the 14th Armored Division support the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion during fighting in Oberhoffen on 6 February 1945.

A M4 dozer tank of the 714th Tank Battalion, 12th Armored Division passes through Colmar on 3 February 1945 after the Colmar pocket was finally eliminated. Behind it is a M3A1 half-track and to the right is a M20 armored utility vehicle.



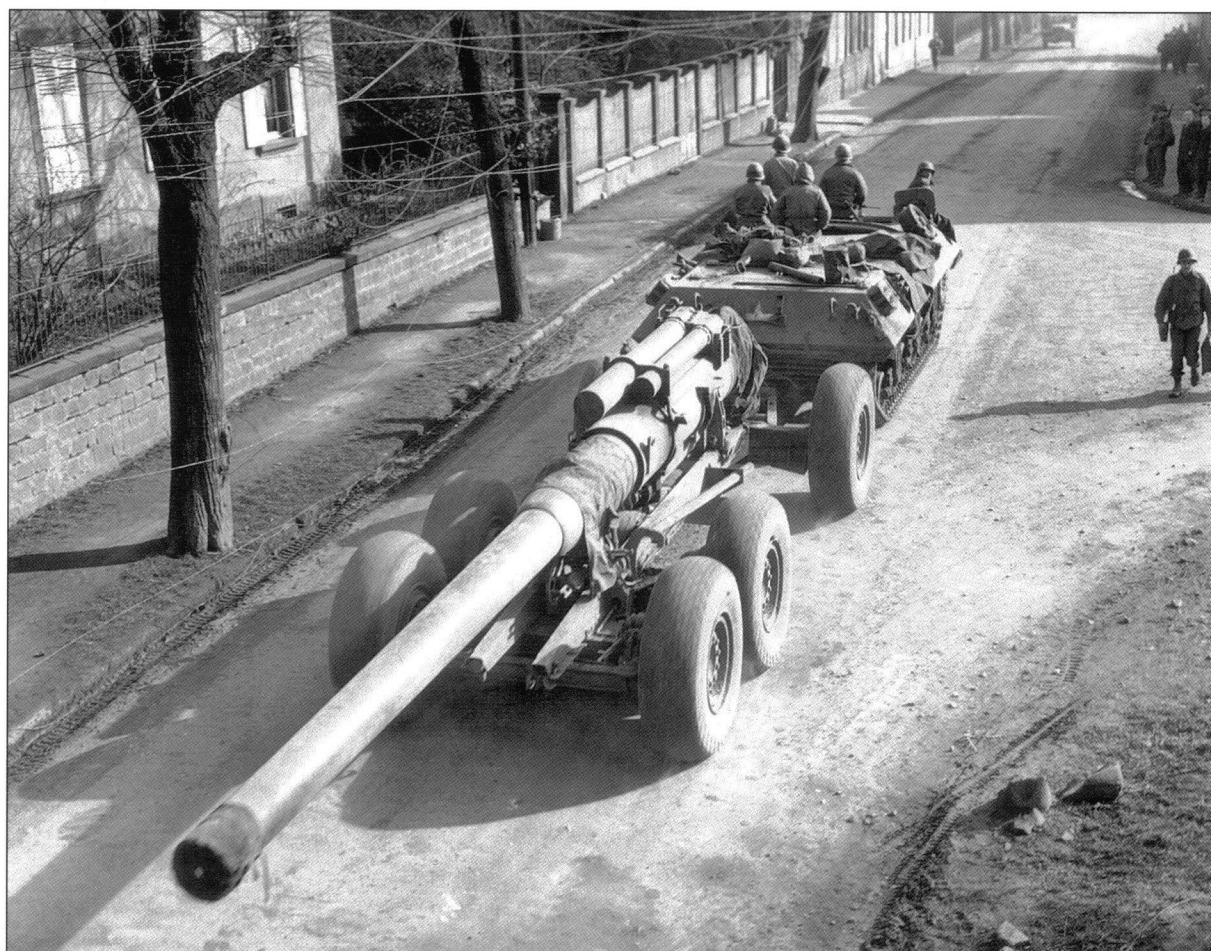
A GI of the 36th Division inspects a Jagdpanzer 38 (t) knocked out during the fighting around Oberhoffen on 13 February 1945 during the efforts to recover areas lost during the Nordwind offensive. Both the 10.SS-Pz.Div. and 21.Pz. Div. operated in this area during the late January fighting.

The M4A2 named "Les Eparges", tactical number 43 of the 3rd platoon, 3rd company, 501st RCC, French 2nd Armored Division near Munster on 15 February 1945 during operations near the German frontier.



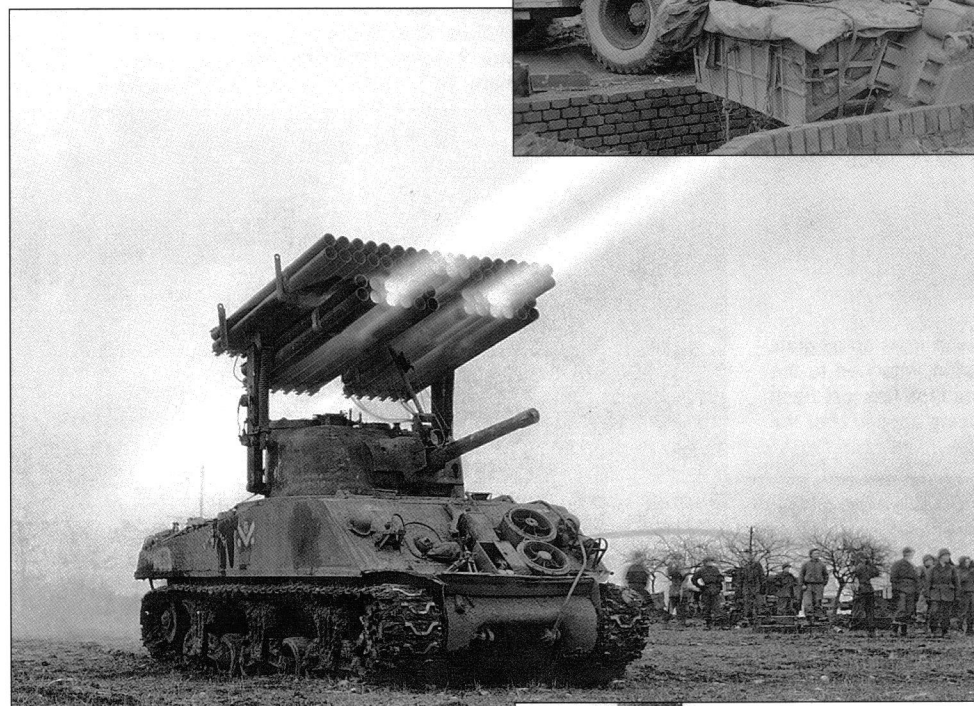


A M35 prime mover of the 575th Field Artillery Battalion, 35th Field Artillery Group is seen here towing the tube from a M1 8 inch (203mm) gun near Monnenheim, France on 26 February 1945. The M35 was an improvised prime mover consisting of a M10 tank destroyer with its turret removed and some modest features added such as a new forward and rear towing pintle. They were used to tow heavy artillery until the definitive M6 high speed tractor became available.



Another view of a M35 prime mover from the 575th Field Artillery Battalion in Monnenheim on 26 February 1945 from the rear provides a better view of the M1 8 inch gun. Due to the size of this weapon, the barrel and recoil assembly were towed separately from the carriage. Once in place, the barrel was moved on to the carriage using a M2 truck mounted crane.

An ordnance unit of the 12th Armored Division mounts a T34 4.5 inch "Calliope" rocket launcher on a M4A3 tank named "Michigan" of the 12th Armored Division near Fletrange, France on 9 March 1944. At the time, the division was in reserve in the Saarbrücken area, awaiting orders to join Patton's Third Army for a push beyond the Rhine river.



After a number of M4A3 were fitted with Calliope rocket launchers at Fletrange, they were test fired to make certain that the mount worked properly. This tank from Co. B, 714th Tank Battalion, named "Cold Storage", is seen firing several 4.5 rockets.



The crew of a M4A3 tank from the 48th Tank Battalion, 12th Armored Division loads 4.5 rockets into the T-34 rocket launcher during test firing near Obermorden, France on 3 March 1945. This view shows many of the features added by ordnance units to the 12th Armored Division tanks including the sandbag appliqué armor on the hull side, and the additional stowage box on the hull rear.



Anti-tank ditches were a major problem when attacking the Siegfried line defenses, and the Seventh Army was the last to penetrate through the Westwall in March 1945. One of the more prevalent improvisations for this task was to adapt the T2 tank recovery vehicle to lay a length of treadway bridge over the gap. This example is interesting in that the turret has been removed and a new jib crane installed by the 6638th Engineer Mine Clearing Company being tested near Badonviller on 3 March 1945.

A crew from the 84th Camouflage Engineer Battalion uses spray guns to repaint a M5A1 light tank of the 781st Tank Battalion, attached to the 100th Division, near Montbronn on 17 March 1945. The tank has just been fitted with appliqué sand-bag armor, and the paint is being applied over the sand-bags, mud, and dirt.

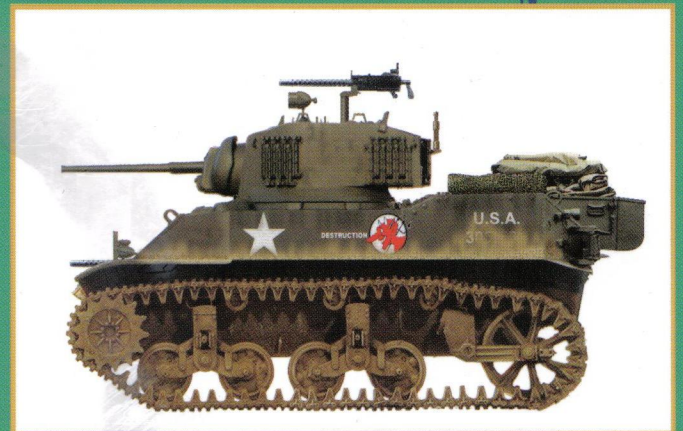
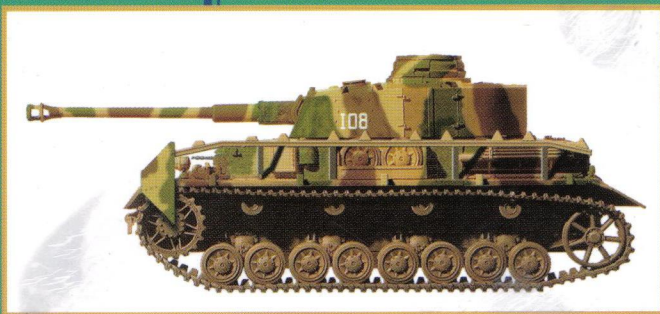


A M4A3 (76mm) moves into Deekenbach on 29 March 1945 with the burning wreckage of a German truck in front of it. This is probably a tank of the 14th Armored Division, which was active in the final battles along the Franco-German border in Alsace.



A dramatic view as a M4 with T-34 Calliope of the 40th Tank Battalion, 14th Armored Division fires a rocket salvo over the Moder river near Obermorden, Germany on 3 March 1945. These operations preceded the 15 March attack into Germany.





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